

In view of 2006 :  
THE INTERNATIONAL  
LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL  
MISSION ASSEMBLY

Brothers of the Christian Schools  
Via Aurelia 476  
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MEL Bulletin

**1**

The 43rd General Chapter of 2000 spent considerable time reflecting on Lasallian Association. It recognised the decisive contribution of Partners and Associates to the Educational Mission, and asked Districts to take this into account (Circ. 447, prop. 1, 2 and 3). Two years after this Chapter, several Districts have begun to set up the necessary structures for participation (Circ. 447, prop. 5 and 6).

This setting up of structures is necessary, first of all, to implement concretely the desire of the Chapter for sharing and association with the Partners and Associates most involved in the Mission. Secondly, it is necessary in order to prepare the International Assembly for the Lasallian Educational Mission which will take place in 2006 (Circ. 447, prop. 3,8; Circ. 448, p. 40).

This Assembly is one of the major innovations of the 43rd General Chapter. The Mission now, from the structural point of view, is no longer solely in the hands of the international community of the Brothers. From now on, it reflects about itself, assesses itself, takes decisions in an exchange of views and debate involving Brothers, Partners and Associates, bound together by a common concern and a dual fidelity: to the founding charism and to present realities.

## I. Preparing the 2006 Assembly

The MEL Standing Committee and the Commission for “Association for the Educational service of the poor” received a mandate to organise this Assembly (Circ. 447, prop. 8; cir. 448 p. 41). In September 2002, two questions surfaced regarding this organisation:

- who will be the District and Delegation delegates to this Assembly?
- how can we stimulate reflection throughout the Institute so that the delegates make this Assembly a highly competent and significant MEL forum, as the new century gets under way?

The answer to the first question is largely in the hands of Districts. It is up to them to identify Brothers, Partners and Associates who are competent, lively, actively involved, with ideas to share. It is from among them that delegates (young persons and adults) will be called to the Assembly. When the time comes, the MEL and Association Secretariats will provide criteria for the choice of delegates.

It is the responsibility of the MEL Standing Committee and of the “Association” Commission to deal with the second question. By 2006, they have to:

- a) diffuse information about the present educational situation in the Institute (networks) as well as examples of Association.
- b) provide high quality information about situations which the Institute, with all its diversity, has had to face (short studies)
- c) promote the holding of discussions and debates (educational forums).

Some work has already been done in these areas in the last two years

### A. Networks (cir.447 prop.15):

Four interactive exchange networks are available on our website [www.lasalle.org](http://www.lasalle.org) or via the [www.vidimusdominum.org](http://www.vidimusdominum.org) website: The areas covered by the networks are as follows:

- education, pedagogy, innovation
- pastoral ministry, catechesis, interreligious dialogue
- Rights of the Child
- educational thinking

These networks have been available for Lasallians since January 2002. It is up to them to inject life into them.

The Secretariat for Lasallian Associates is collecting information at present concerning Lasallian formation programmes with a view to establishing a network for exchanging material.

## B. Short studies relating to areas covering Mission and Association (cir.447 prop.7)

Since March 2002, we have asked various bodies to undertake studies. These bodies - Lasallian universities, the National Institute for Pedagogical Research in Paris, groups - were chosen for their competence in the following fields:

- Statistical study of our educational work in our usual works, non-formal works, help given to other private, State and Church organisations (Mexico City Lasallian universities)
- Study of District projects published in the last 10 years (Madrid University Centre)
- Study on Lasallian universities and the Lasallian project (Universities in Philadelphia, Bogota and Manila)
- Study on the characteristics of Lasallian innovations in pedagogical, educational, pastoral and associative areas (INRP Paris)
- Study on educational trends, continent by continent
- Study on the proposal of, and education in the faith in the Lasallian pastoral ministry
- Study on the situation in Districts regarding the educational service of the poor
- Study on the construction of personal identity (a series of 3 working sessions with the General Council and the Secretaries of general services in Rome)
- Report on our work promoting the Rights of the Child

- Study on Lasallian identity: Brothers, Lay persons
- Study on new forms of Lasallian association.

These studies will be published in booklet form and made available to Lasallians.

## C. Educational forums (cir.447 prop.7)

In April 2002, Brother Regionals and Visitors were sent the following information:

### Aims:

The aim of the educational forums is:

- to study and understand the present-day educational situations in the various parts of the Institute
- to question our present-day concrete responses to educational situations
- to consider the forms of actions to adopt which will be suited to future situations.

These forums will generate a body of information and documents. Between 2003 and 2005, this information will be sent by Regions and Districts to MEL which will prepare a synthesis of all the material received while respecting the various cultural differences involved. This synthesis will be prepared between September 2005 and March 2006 so as to be ready for the International MEL Assembly to be held in May 2006.

### Persons targeted by the forums:

These forums are intended for all promoters of the Lasallian mission (young people, educators, parents, former students, administrators, catechists, and resource-persons...), according to the means of Regions and Districts.

## Contents of forums

The Standing Committee has chosen:

- 3 **areas** on which attention should be concentrated
- This is done by the study of a series of **topics**
- The topics chosen should provide answers to 4 **questions**

### Areas on which to concentrate attention

- A.** the building up and growth of the individual
- B.** the building up of the common good and of social life
- C.** the development of interiority, spirituality and the proposal of faith in Jesus Christ as an option

#### **Area A: What influences young people today in their growth as persons.**

##### **Suggested topics:**

**A1:** Youth culture: mentality, behaviour, interests, values, means at their disposal to promote their personal growth.

**A2:** The family, present forms of family life, roles in families, the new phenomenon of “adoption” in reconstituted families, one-parent families, family-substitutes, repercussions on the personal growth of young people.

**A3:** Impact of new technology on the attitude of young people, family life, education, the role of teachers

**A4:** Education in responsibility: affective relationships, social relations

**A5:** Initiation into interior life, spirituality.

.....

#### **Area B: What influences the young people in the development of their social conscience.**

**B1:** The universal access to knowledge

**B2:** Access to the world at large

**B3:** Community service

**B4:** Voluntary service

**B5:** Civil, social and political commitment

**B6:** Commitment to the human rights of groups at risk (women, children, displaced persons, handicapped people)

**B7:** Respect for creation

.....

#### **Area C: What influences young people in the development of their spiritual life, in the deepening of their understanding of their own religious faith, and in their proposal of the Christian faith as an option wherever this can be done**

**C1:** Programmes of human and religious formation

**C2:** Programmes and organisation of voluntary service

**C3:** Programmes promoting the awakening of faith and Christian commitment

**C4:** Inter-faith dialogue

**C5:** Ecumenical dialogue

.....

The **4 questions** for which each suggested theme should try to find answers:

1. Look at the situation in your District or in your Region in the light of the topic chosen, and determine in what areas and how young people and adults in formation are influenced by their environment.
2. What concrete responses do institutions and works provide in the face of this influence?
3. What results do these responses obtain? What can we say about the relevance of our responses?
4. What kinds of action or procedures should we adopt to respond more fully in the near future? What criteria and what forms of evaluation should be applied?

Networks, Studies, Forums, 3 means offered to Districts and Lasallians (Brothers, Partners, Associates, young persons and adults) to help them understand better the educational and pastoral situa-

tion today; to study Lasallian identity and how to share the Lasallian charism in the various cultures and with educators of other religions.; to help us assess what as an Institute we are offering, and to find answers to today's needs which are adapted to the times.

Quite clearly, the 2006 Assembly is a logical follow-on from the ideas and the commitments made in the last two Chapters. In fact, these two Chapters devoted a great of energy to drawing up a general outline of the Lasallian Educational Mission, giving much attention to the various persons who carry it out.

As a way of recalling the overall thinking behind the process which has been going on in the Institute for the last 10 years, and which will continue till 2006, it would be good to re-read and make known some of the texts which have shown us the way.

## II. Overall context of the Lasallian Educational Mission

Since 1993, this context has been defined by a number of documents which give coherence to the very numerous commitments and initiatives in the various Lasallian Regions. Lasallians who actively promote this mission should have a clear idea of it in order to understand that the Institute's constant concern is to be increasingly present in the world of education and evangelisation, which is its natural environment.

### • 1993: 42nd General Chapter (Circ 435, p.18-25)

Recalling the 5 previous years, the Chapter restates its burning enthusiasm for the mission, and its awareness of the expectations and needs of present-day youth. It decides to take action on 4 points in particular.

#### *Appendix 1*

### • 1994-1999: 5 international Institute Colloquia were held

Each colloquium had its own theme: families, globalisation, mega-urban sprawl, new information and communication technologies, communication of the faith. (*Institute Bulletin No. 245*)

In its general conclusions, it identifies 6 sociological mega-tendencies (p. 113-121): they permeate the whole educational field. Educators and Christians cannot ignore them.

#### *Appendix 2*

### • 2000: 43rd General Chapter (Circ. 447, p.19-33)

Adding to the declarations of 1993, the General Chapter indicates lines of action and calls for the implementation of more of its convictions. It defines its new areas of concern and dedicates structures to them.

#### *Appendix 3*

### • 2000: 43rd General Chapter (Circ. 447, p. 1-8)

In these pages, the General Chapter concentrates all its attention on those who carry out the mission. It wishes to recognise their irreplaceable contribution and stimulate new forms of collaboration and sharing.

#### *Appendix 4*

These texts taken together spell out both our vision of education, and the fact that we take into account the changing situations which affect our young people and adults in formation. These texts remind us that we cannot be satisfied with a few educational and pastoral adaptations, but we must join all those who are grappling with the great issues affecting the future - an excellent ground for learning - in everyday life, the economy, lasting development, couples, families, the social contract, traditional wisdom, the great religions.

They demonstrate our will to improve our understanding constantly of changes, and to allow ourselves to be challenged by them increasingly more profoundly, because they shake even the philosophical, anthropological and theological notions on which our understanding of life is based. They call upon us to face up to such salutary questions as the following:

— how do we analyse educational phenomena? With whom? With what methodological instruments? To bring about what transfor-

mations? What first hand knowledge do we have of the world of young people?

— With whom and for whom do we work?

— Where and with what groups do we nourish our thinking and our philosophical, anthropological and theological research?

— What educational, pastoral and spiritual approaches do we try? And why?

— What future choices are we preparing? with what organisations are we working? With what collaborators? What liberties do we take ?

— What specific contribution do we make to the world of education and evangelisation? In what domain are we prophets?

— What formation processes have we organised so that Brothers and lay people can learn more about Lasallian spirituality and the Lasallian charism?

And so — Brothers, Partners, Associates, young people and adults — all of us have to start preparing together the International Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission of 2006.

First in our Regions and Districts. Next, when the time comes, with our delegates. This preparation should be nourished by Institute texts, the Networks, the Studies and the Forums which will tell us all about our diverse and complex situations.

That is the wish of the MEL Standing Committee and of the Commission for the “Association for the Educational Service of the Poor.”

Br. Nicolas Capelle  
*MEL Secretariat*

Br. Antonio Botana  
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The Institute, a Community of  
Brothers associated for the  
Educational Service of the Poor in a  
changing World and Church

“Nations everywhere, open your doors to Christ” (*Redemptoris Missio*)

## 1. Preamble

**1.1 The 42nd General Chapter is part of a continuing process, an Institute movement, which has gradually developed since the 1950s.**

After the shock of the Second World War and the great political and cultural changes it brought about, we entered a period of destabilisation, of the breaking up of old systems (social, political, geographical, religious...) that were fossilised and monolithic. There exists now a whole mosaic of cultures and differences. These upset our over-simplified plans and our deepest convictions. They upset the Church, too, and the Institute with it.

However, in spite of all the blows, uncertainties, hesitations and losses, the Institute re-wrote its beliefs over a period of 30 years: it rediscovered the Founder, faced up to the changes in society and young people, clarified its identity and the nature of its mission, made room for new partners, became open to other cultures and religions. It produced a series of powerful documents (Declaration, the 1966 and 1976 General Chapters, Circulars, the 1987 Rule, Pastoral Letters...) which form a coherent body of teaching, which are a source of inspiration and commitment for us and which invite us to face the world of today and tomorrow with confidence.

This we can do because our faith persuades us:

— that God is already there and that he wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (R 19);

— that our Institute, together with other organisations, must continue to help promote the development of societies and young people. As it does this, it should also offer, as part of its vocation in the Church, the means of achieving spiritual freedom while respecting different cultures and individuals (R 18).

### **1.2 We ourselves are evangelised by the Church and Vatican Council II, by the many young people and adults we meet day after day, and we assert our commitment to this constantly changing world (R 15).**

Together with other men and women, we too are:

—**captivated by and accomplices** with its glitter, its science, its discoveries, its technology, its progress, its madness, its pursuit of power, but we **side with** informed men and women who use science and technology in the pursuit of the common good;

—**exasperated** by its complexity, its morbid hunger, its depravity, but we **side with** enlightened men and women who teach and recall the paramount importance of the individual;

—**angered** by its contempt for people, its brutal hatred, its duplicity, but we **side with** institutions which tirelessly fight so that differences may remain and that the plurality of cultures may enrich the common heritage;

—**powerless** before its injustices, its fratricidal wars, its selfish jealousies, its means of communication appropriated by money and private interests, but we **side with** those institutions that, step by step, try not to overlook differences and the plurality of cultures and try to enrich our common patrimony (R 17d).

### **1.3 The Church sends us as consecrated lay people in religious life to work for the “new evangelisation” of young people and adults who live in this world in all settings, in all cultures, in all religious faiths (R 19):**

— We go to those who are already with us, Christians or not, in school, in training centres for young people and adults, in pastoral centres, in Church groups and in a variety of organisations.

— We go to those who do not have the means to learn and be trained enough to take their place in society (because of famine, war, ignorance, oppression, destruction of homes...)

— We go to those who are victims of economic and political turmoil and who suffer the brunt of the spasms of a disturbed world (unemployment, substance abuse, AIDS, suicide...).

— We go to those who are looking for values, for a word of encouragement, of faith, who wish to slake their thirst with the Word of God.

All are waiting for us to share with them the charism we have. As professionally competent educators, we consider our work as a ministry and we come to them as Brothers, full of respect and open up for them a way to God (R 13, 20, 21).

And because of the Gospel, our presence in their midst must be positive, critical, prophetic and creative (R 18).

### **1.4 As members of the Institute of St. John Baptist de La Salle, we strongly re-affirm our option for the human and Christian education of young people and adults, and in particular for the poor.**

We re-affirm it with joy and hope. Why?

— In spite of doubts, the Brothers have never abandoned the work of education. On the contrary, they involve themselves in it even more than before, with the conviction, shared by many other people, that it is there that the future of humanity lies.

— Many Brothers work with courage and success in schools which become increasingly places where the aspirations as well as the perplexities of youth seeking educational guideposts are expressed. These Brothers are the proof that a school of high quality, one that is respectful of all and whose mission is rooted in the Gospel, renders an inestimable service.

— Many Brothers of all ages throughout the world have made strenuous efforts to become trained and to adapt to all kinds of social situations so that, aware of new needs, they can work with young people and adults in their own context.

— Every Brother has the charism of brotherhood. Thanks to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he has the ability to relate to young people

and adults and to discover with them the means of achieving human and spiritual development (R 20).

— In many parts of the world, and especially in the third-world continents, Brothers have made a strong commitment to help the most deprived young people and adults, convinced that God calls us to renew our Institute by this deliberate return to those who are most affected by collective injustice (R 32).

— Brothers on the threshold of retirement from their profession continue their mission as educators as members of various organisations. There they discover other forms of hidden poverty and help young people and adults who have been marginalised by the complexity and hardness of society. Often these Brothers rediscover the specific nature of their call, a call which had become dormant as a result of a necessarily highly organised professional life, overly dependent on administrative regulations.

Brothers, we are associated by vow for the educational service of the poor. We are committed, as communities, to run schools or Christian educational centres which are accessible to them (R 39). The obligation which we have accepted willingly commits us to be witnesses in the world:

- active witnesses to the dignity of all people (R 11);
- active witnesses to their rights and especially to their rights to human, religious and Christian education if they desire it (R 12);
- active witnesses to basic human values (solidarity, justice, tolerance...) which make true brotherhood possible between peoples and nations (R 9);
- active witnesses to the need for adapted educational structures (R 3, 13);
- active witnesses to the urgent need for national and international programmes which include specific cultural measures regarding the poor (R 13b);
- active witnesses to God's solicitude for people who are marginalised by great poverty and other modern forms of misery (R 41);
- active witnesses to the mission of the Redeeming Christ which must reach all nations and all ages (R 19).

**1.5 In this way, we collectively repeat today the commitment of our Founder who “was deeply moved by the way in which the children of the artisans and the poor were abandoned and left to themselves” and discovered in faith the mission of his Institute, as a concrete response to his contemplation of God's plan of salvation.**

*“In order to respond to this divine plan and also to situations of distress similar to those that the Founder knew, the Institute desires to be present to the world today as part of the Church's work in spreading the Gospel.*

*The Institute is concerned above all for the educational needs of the poor as they strive to become aware of their dignity and to live and to be recognised as human beings and children of God. The Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its work according to what the Kingdom of God requires” (R 11).*

## 2. Observations

The Brothers of the Chapter, enriched by their personal experience but also invested with the hopes and concerns of the Brothers of their Districts who work steadfastly to meet the needs of youth, **are aware that the Brothers are called upon to respond to major challenges:**

- migratory movements, racism, urban violence, terrorism, drug addiction, loss of basic human values, crises of faith, refusal of religious education, the attraction of sects, unemployment, AIDS, hunger, illiteracy, street children, homelessness, contempt of life, broken families, school dropouts....

This list is unfortunately not exhaustive. However, in their own way, the Brothers and communities try to come up with appropriate responses. While acknowledging what has been accomplished up to now, the Chapter has focused its attention on four points:

## 2.1 The Rights of the Child

The Convention of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989; it became international law in 1990.

In most nations the rights of the child are ignored; this convention is extremely helpful, especially for poor children who find in it a protection and safeguard against exploitation and abuse.

## 2.2 Illiteracy

Illiteracy is an increasing phenomenon, not only in third-world countries but also in the developed world. In addition, it affects not only the written word but also new languages (images, sound...) that the poor use almost exclusively.

Illiteracy is at the root of many situations of poverty and hardship because it is a drawback to development and hinders social integration and all critical thinking. It affects directly the dignity of millions of children, adolescents and adults, condemning them to hopelessness which can trigger outbreaks of sudden violence and can deteriorate to degrading passivity.

## 2.3 Values education

The human community is more and more imbued with a sense of planetary consciousness: together we are responsible because we are more and more dependent on each other:

- for the quality of life which we pass on to younger generations;
- for the environment and the resources which we leave behind.

As educators, we are required to examine our educational programmes and methods. People of good will will co-operate if education fosters justice, respect, solidarity, tolerance, recollection, peace and respect for life (from conception to death).

As educators, we are also duty-bound to respect our world and its environment, human and physical; the human race is responsible for the management of the earth and its resources.

## 2.4 Specific accompaniment of the young

In several regions of the world, many societies have been destabilised by the economic crisis, migratory movements, overcrowding in the cities. Many young people are the first victims of this upheaval, slipping into petty crime and delinquency: aimless drifting, unemployment, drugs, AIDS, prison, prostitution, violence.

These young people, excluded and feeling rejected, quite often need a specific type of accompaniment over a long period to help them rediscover the ordinary rhythm of social integration through formation, work and, sometimes, therapy.

In these four particular areas, the Chapter encourages whatever initiatives may be taken, no matter their importance, in order to strengthen our solidarity with those associations and organisations who work for the rights of children, youth and adults. But it is clear that the profound and unconditional respect we should have for persons in suffering obliges us to bring them, at the right moment, the best gift for which we have been consecrated ministers of the word. In order to realise their full humanity, they should be touched by the Gospel and by Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. "The best service that we can render our brothers and sisters is the evangelisation that helps them to live and act as children of God, that eliminates injustices and helps in the total development of the person" (Puebla).

It is the entire Institute which must be on the alert and commit itself in a significant way to formation, to human and Christian education, especially in those situations where we can become earnestly involved in fidelity to the charism of our Institute and our vow of association.

The mission is everywhere. It requires today a new, imaginative approach, mobility and volunteers who are willing, determined and prepared.

( 1993 : 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter  
Circ. 435 p. 18-25)

The Institute of the Brothers of the  
Christian Schools and Education today

Five colloquia towards a more informed  
understanding

## General Conclusions

The conclusions are of two kinds: the first ones are related to the process of discussion, the second ones are related to the important trends which are impinging on the educational arena such as we have seen during these past six years.

### I. With regard to the process of discussion

#### 1. Rereading reality.

This is an Institute custom: John Baptist de La Salle ingrained it in us and we find it continually throughout the last three centuries.

John Baptist de La Salle was not a sociologist nor was he a specialist in social analysis; but his priestly concern developed within him a great attentiveness to situations and events and a pertinent imagination to carry out specific choices (dealing with persons, relationships, methods, decisions, reticence) strategically in accord with the purposes indicated in his program.

The rereading of situations is at the very center of the Lasallian process; we cannot escape it. Carrying out the colloquia has shown that this rereading must be done while keeping in mind four interdependent elements. We would point out that each one of them can be treated as a separate element for purposes of discussion, but it is quickly evident that each element needs to be connected to the other three.

The four elements are:

- the end of the Institute;
- specific realities of the contemporary world;
- basic texts and history;
- humble, simple, significant and legible practices carried out by Brothers and by their collaborators.

This having been said, there is not **one reading** of reality but there are **readings** of realities. Clearly, if one looks at reality based on the Lasallian view alone (with its historical roots and mission awareness) one might have the illusion of understanding reality rapidly, clearly and effectively as well as the forms of updating which are capable of transforming it in order to make it conform to our Lasallian nature. Only a strong central mentality concerning our Lasallian identity would produce this tenacious illusion.

The reality of situations is very complex and requires - without denying who we are and what our mission is - abandoning the center of things and examining them with a minimum of formality and at a distance. And for that purpose one excellent technique is to assume the successive point of view of the rest of the elements which, along with ourselves, make up the reality which we all experience together. So then we have a methodological requirement that makes us understand that other readings of reality are possible and legitimate and which, finally, our worn out eyes should rejuvenate if we want to perceive the works of God today: God ceaselessly creates new things and his knocking on the world's door has previously unknown forms. It is the other specifics (systems, persons, organizations) which are going to help us in rejuvenating our view of the context in which we live together.

#### 2. Changes and ruptures

- The general context of our realities is marked by change. This is the very essence of our society. We have no reason to be sorry about this. We are caught in a fluidity of information, experiences, wants, unexpected back and forth movements produced by financial murmuring, natural disasters, a political decision made at one end of the planet, readily available new technologies, scandals, a product promoted over the airwaves, etc. The general mentality of our contemporaries and even of ourselves is immersed in a widespread feeling of that which is provisional, precarious, an unexpected outbreak.

Why? This is the result of the interdependence of nations, societies and economies. From now on we are no longer alone. The consequences of this are considerable for our structures and our undertakings as Institute. Our action plans have now been changed.

- Often we are accustomed to notice gaps, deficiencies and contradictions in our training and educational situations. We then look for corrective activities in order to apply them voluntarily according to our clear and well-known purposes. This lineal strategy based on a cause-effect relationship has its value but also it has its own surprises (adverse effects, a partial view, focusing on false issues, easy solutions, hiding the deepest causes...).
- Yet another type of strategy could restore the balance between analysis and action. It is also necessary to keep in mind the interests, ideals, the open or hidden purposes of our collaborators and the components of the systems that surround us and that shape reality as well as ourselves. They shape reality often more intensely than we do because they are rooted more deeply in persons, customs, lifestyles, basic interests and other more commonly shared elements. We find in all of this a deterministic mechanism. The first four Colloquia were constructive in this regard. Our ideals and our educational and Christian strategies may be very beautiful and bountiful; but they are counter-productive if we have not placed them again in their general context made up of family relationships, new technology, financial interests, urban or popular contexts.
- But this should not give us cause for alarm. Effectively, we find some Brothers and Lasallians in all places throughout the world who have integrated this way of analyzing the complexity and doing it along with all sorts of their colleagues and creators of restlessness. But the power and the witness of our educational initiatives bring that price with them.
- At the same time, all this can be topped off by a healthy questioning that we force ourselves to look at (institutions, processes, signs, lectures, commitments) and which perhaps no longer is part and parcel of the origins because the world changes and life is replete with ruptures. And this deals with persons as well as with organizations.

### **3. What we are demonstrating**

We are talking about the understandability of what we are doing in

the educational area. How is the message that we are emitting received? Our intentions may be abundant but what do our collaborators say? This issue was often raised during the Colloquia. And it is an important one. In effect, we are not a multi-nation entity which develops its educational tapestry wherever it will. In the world of education we are a voice that has something specific to propose; and that should be done by means of a powerful witness which is not always subject to an impressive, strong institution which is sure of itself; Gospel practices teach us something else.

Here is something which forces us to undertake a renewed discussion about implementation and site location, methods, solidarity, functioning, personnel, etc.

In each Colloquium Brothers who came from all over the world reminded us of the witness of humble, simple, modest educational processes which are seen by the poor and by the rich.

## **II. With regard to powerful trends which impact the educational arena**

While listening to the members of the Colloquium, observing the reactions of experts who had come from the five continents to deal with the task by making use of other pertinent studies, little by little we saw some important trends surface - trends which seem to pervade the general environment today, the environment in which young people, families, the Brothers, Lasallians and other collaborators live and in which the process of human and Christian education is carried out and to which we have consecrated our lives.

Those trends seem to be in practice on the five continents. Obviously they are represented in different ways and their presence does not have the same import in all places. Nevertheless, during the course of the 5 Colloquia, the participants were able to underscore them and recognize their influence on educational practices.

Those trends are clearly seen from the perspective of a Lasallian prism which looks at the world in a particular way and especially at the world of education. Other observers probably would not have been able to sense the same degree of urgency on this point,

but our view finds its legitimacy in our specific mission and in the objectives that this analysis can bring to bear with more precision.

We have identified 6 trends that seem to condition our educational efforts.

- A. Supervised finances - Money - Violence
- B. Migration - Wandering - The Marginalized
- C. Individual acts - Collective conscience
- D. Families - Man/Woman - Parents/Children
- E. Young people - School - Formation - Educators
- F. Search for meaning - Doubts - Wisdom

### A. Supervised finances - Money - Violence

- Societies are becoming more and more organized, supervised, subject to financial rules dictated by international organizations which transcend borders.
- The way in which finances work is not understandable for the majority of people: multi-national entities absorb, buy and sell at the world level for reasons that escape even a minimal understanding.
- Nevertheless it is easily understood that the engine for all this financial agitation and which alarms everyone is, quite simply, the domination of power over the markets, over consumer customs, over the monetary flow which travel by means of stock markets and by immediate electronic techniques.
- Money has become the center of concern because its necessity is imperative and no one knows how to act or think apart from it. It is the first criterion for relationships, commitments, lifestyles, the taking of power.
- Therefore national governments (the very G7) have less and less room in which to maneuver: international organizations dictate their laws. In this way democracy becomes devoid of content and nations are at the mercy of some financiers and masked players.
- All of this fosters the development of parallel, illegal finances which permit many to survive and a smaller number to become rich. Corruption is carried out on all levels and infects all societies.
  - In poor neighborhoods, each is permitted to establish a certain type of “justice” and to limit the development of violence

towards those who have nothing, or who escape to the network of social organization or the law of the market and the formation of expendables.

— In the megalopolises antagonistic groups are allowed to find a *modus vivendi* which the official doctrine of social equality does not feel itself called to establish. Each entity, then, has need of someone poor who in turn has need of someone who is poorer than he is...in order to consolidate his power and to realize small benefits which will allow him to survive. Because quite simply survival is what is at stake; what is moral has nothing to do with anything here.

— On the trans-national scale clandestine corporations with identical interests are being established in order to go forward in the operation imposed by banks, governments, international organizations, multi-national entities..., all of them with an appearance of official legitimacy and of which no one knows anything about to the point where they take advantage of this opaqueness of the world economic system.

These corporations transcend countries and blur the former North/South separation. From now on the North is in all the places where the South is and vice-versa. These secret corporations with common interests are rushing headlong into new forms of consumerism and they are present where easy money is king (drugs, tourism, prostitution, the clothing market, electronics, forging industries...). Who can escape them?

- There they are then, finally, all the necessary ingredients for the explosion of sporadic, sudden violence, apparently irrational, that the social organization cannot foresee and about which causes are not sufficiently known in order to anticipate and control them; very often one is obliged to repress without really understanding. This phenomenon little by little bores into even organized societies which, by their very organization, are the most vulnerable when facing the development of violence which casts into doubt the future possibility of “human togetherness.”

### B. Migration - Wandering - The Marginalized

- Financial precariousness, the search for work, ethnic conflicts, wars which leave entire families strewn by the highways, children

left alone. More and more refugees are concentrated on the borders. And it is predicted that within 30 years, there will be created 10 border cities which will be centers for misery and violence, while 90 other cities will develop, especially in the southern hemisphere.

- In many countries the cities are exploding. They receive immigrants from within and without who arrive with many needs but without the competent authorities having had time to plan and to organize services and indispensable structures. These cities are growing out of control and they juxtapose very diverse populations, whose codes of “human togetherness” are not adapted to one another, if indeed they do exist at all.
- Today people live amidst a generalized precariousness and their future is unforeseeable. Psychologically a sense of wandering pervades the current mentality, beyond the imposed migrations. No longer is it known where the permanent and the solid are rooted: work is precarious, the political situation is precarious, marriage is precarious, relationships are precarious. More and more persons live with a sense of the immediate, the passing, the ephemeral, with a free-flowing of information, they sense that which is impalpable, multiple, consumable, throwaway. They have a sense of a life governed by insecurity and one which no longer has traits of an historic drama that has its stages, progression, orientation, duration; but life shows a semblance of a tragic future that cannot be overcome, that is imposed and which inclines one to say with resignation: “What has to happen will happen”. We are no longer in a tension towards the future, something inherent in Christianity, but we are faced with a cyclic concept of time, which is proper to paganism. This is our destiny!
- In addition, certain societies are in a certain way so marked and regulated that they provoke a defensive reaction: individuals tend to escape, enjoy themselves, once in a while they deny the daily subjection and its routine. The year is then measured by vacation, happenings (games, sports, demonstrations), surprising meetings, unexpected events, singular events (Carnival, Halloween...), former rhythms...as a way of forgetting the boredom and the organization of modern society.
- But this may also give rise to the commonly shared sense of an imbalance between real life and a dreamed life, between a real or an imagined marginality. More than others, young people from all environments are aware of this marginality.

- In the very poor areas: they experience it physically and every day they see social images that stir up insolence in them.
- In the middle class: they transport it in their imagery because unemployment is waiting for them and the social position of their very own parents can vacillate abruptly the next day. They themselves are not certain of being able to get a firm grip on the social scale.
- In the privileged classes: they feel it in the depths of their being because, they who have everything, have never had to fight in order to live or to really exist. They are afraid that tomorrow they will turn into dust, because of their lack of resistance and fight they have no consistency in these areas, but only an outward appearance of human beings.

There is a collective schizophrenia that lies in wait for everyone and which is fed by publicity, television serials, a certain type of cinema, Internet services, courtrooms, videos...

### C. Individual acts - Collective conscience

- Societies are required more and more to keep individuals in mind. It is not enough for them to administer to groups, but they ought to take care of the diversity of persons within those groups. Relationships between strengths and conflicts are more difficult to administer.
- This is not the only consequence of what is unwillingly called “individualism” and the fact that it is a conquest in which Christianity has itself played a role should not be surprising. All societies have not assimilated this as yet.
- It is also the result of being more respectfully aware of persons, their subjectivity, their personal choices, their expressions, desires, their freedom. It is now understood better that the person has dignity and that he should realize a process of individualization. But all societies do not subscribe to this idea yet.
- In spite of everything, that personal process often appears to be risky and dangerous. In effect, the great philosophical and religious stories might be thrown out, unappreciated, made relative and, as a result, the individual finds himself very much alone in facing the great issues that pursue him. And truth is fragmented into points of view, philosophical references no longer structure

research, relativism pervades everything and the individual becomes discouraged, closes in on himself or abandons the internal process which he had begun with courage.

- Nevertheless this individualization does not wipe out the need for encounters or the need for others. On the contrary the formation of “tribes” has been noted, groups with like affinities, groups which are interested in searching for intimacy, solidarity. Even in the big cities, some neighborhoods are organized as a type of “village”, each one contributing his originality and coming away with security and recognition.
- Thanks to the means of rapid communication each one has the possibility of being open to the world’s problems in greater ways. Entire countries, entire continents are capable of being emotional about and sensitive to some distant squalid conditions, to the point where an emotive and concrete solidarity is encouraged and which is remembered for a long time.
- But, if solidarity exists, it nonetheless is difficult to maintain this in the long term and commit to a lasting effort of discussion about the structures and causes of injustice, misfortunes and conflict. Instant unity is also one aspect of “entertainment” and of “wandering”.
- To conclude let us note that little by little a common conscience is being developed: human ecology is becoming a concern:

Man, his dignity, his freedom, no matter his location;  
The abandoned and socially excluded;  
The sick, the feeble, the victims;  
The planet and what we will pass on tomorrow to our children;  
Deprived and exploited populations.

This common conscience unites men and women from all tendencies and from all religions. It probably expresses what is most authentic about present-day humanity and it allows for a reasonable hope.

#### D. Families - Man/Woman - Parents/Children

- All societies are worried about the FAMILY. Everywhere the family is being shaken up and the causes are many: unemployment, migration, consumerism, means of communication, indi-

vidualism, the loss of ethical and religious points of reference... The forms of the family institution are changing and sometimes the forms mix with one another. Certain discussions would lead one to believe that the FAMILY is disappearing. On the contrary, this is not true.

- In effect, when there are more difficulties, so much more does the FAMILY become the point of reference, the last refuge for protection, where to take shelter in order not to die. It is guarding or rediscovering one of its primitive purposes: to be the first and last place in which to survive. All societies are alike in this no matter what great technical and social progress has been achieved. But when certain family societies can no longer maintain their children and they toss them into the street, those family societies cry out in desperation and they are seen as dispossessing their very dignity and their reason for being; the drama is complete.
- As a result, all societies have a keen consciousness of the family reality and its basic value. They know that the will to live has its origin in the family, there it places its trust, as well as in others and in the future. They will also attest that within the family are the roots of violence, exploitation, hate. Therefore they very often permit a considerable effort to be made to sustain families, to help them and to protect them (social aid, legislation, juridical devices, legal recognition...). International organizations have worked very hard in this respect, supporting efforts by countries and non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) which fight for the right of families and children. Little by little they create the conditions for an international conscience.
- But individuals are not far behind. Each knows very well that his personal work of humanization depends upon the family reality that he builds by means of changing forms and sometimes successive forms that are given to him to live, pushed by the circumstances and encounters that pile up as never before in human history.
- Therefore we look after the development of considerable activity in order to give human meaning to family reorganization, to the new “adoptions” between marriages and children from various families, to technical resources for assisted procreation and to the freedom to procreate. We see in all this a gigantic effort to not merely put up with the event but, based on the event itself, to build a life that has meaning, that allows for the finding of paths

towards humanization and to develop immense resources of human conscience and its creative possibilities. We can perceive in all this a co-creative participation in God's work.

- Within this environment the Church has much to say to contemporary man. Unfortunately the Church might be interpreted as a judge and not as a companion who helps one along the journey and to make new journeys. The means of communication greatly simplify the Church's discourse, but she herself does not always hit the mark in her formulation and at times one can get lost in the labyrinth of a complex thought. But beyond the language difficulty or the grasping of issues, don't we feel here the most radical struggle foretold by the Gospel?: the struggle between the "world" and the Kingdom, between darkness and light. This struggle penetrates deep into the hearts of men until reaching the most vulnerable part: that part in which relationships are created which lead to talent, possession, life, death. And the first place for this human and Christian struggle is precisely within the family. The Church cannot be but interested in this. And neither can Christian educators.

- At the center of the family, obviously, is the married couple. No other era in history has scrutinized with such determination male-female relationships in terms of their usual studies, but also in terms of what was previously unknown with regard to family life, social life, the concept of association and even in the life of the Church. This is in part due to the progressive disappearance of traditional social roles observed in certain favored societies, but it is also due to a general sharpened consciousness of the basic role of women in social activities.

Clearly this basic role is not new. On the other hand, the awareness of this role which is becoming more and more clear is relatively recent. It is clear that there is a certain resistance to this in certain areas, there is evidence of some unrest in male societies which want to protect themselves...but groups of women are being established that want to take up the reins of the future of communities, build new financial relationships, new networks of solidarity, a new social understanding. The next century will tell if the planet is administered better by women than by men.

- In some places in the world the role of women has become the predominant issue especially in the life of the family, which diminishes or takes away the role of the father. Single parent families are a common phenomenon and many women are becoming

ing accustomed to living without a husband, thus creating families where a man does not enter the picture. These female societies are shelters where the imaginary and a sense of stillness are exacerbated to the detriment of distancing by means of difference and law. Education should keep this in mind.

- These important relational issues (male/female relationships, heterosexuality, homosexuality, fusion, separation, single parent families, adoption, homosexual families, bi-sexual relationships with regard to the child, etc.) are often lived out in a rough type of arrangement that is entrusted to the good will of individuals. An exaggerated respect for persons and situations keeps one from providing instruments for discussion and discernment on the philosophical, anthropological, theological and spiritual order.

This general observation is also valid for young people (adolescents and young adults) who find themselves abandoned while facing structure questions involving sexuality, otherness, the development of love, acceptance of the child. The Church and the Christian school must transmit their messages as part of the basis of these issues.

- On the other hand, all of this has an impact on the parent/child relationship. On one side adults argue almost in isolation concerning relational issues previously unknown while on the other side children are being shaped by means of communication, the street, friends and merchandising initiatives. Sometimes it seems that there is an impassable trench separating parents and children. But, although the interests and mentalities may collide, children always hope for much from their parents, even when they have failed in their mission. In the majority of cases children and young people expect their parents to watch over them and offer them some words: they are eager for this type of communication and although there may be confrontation, it always serves to give them structure. Parents should foster this conviction which may give them strength and trust as they deal with their children.

## E. Young people - School - Formation - Educators

- In the area of formation and school, parents search for what is best for their children. They ask the school for quality instruction and training; they invest in the school and they often request that

the school fulfill the role that they themselves do not accomplish within the family.

- School and educational programs are very much dependent on the social concerns of countries. Three realistic aspects can be underscored among these which sometimes get hidden beneath a barrage of ceremonial lexical trappings:

- The financial need for markets with their technological wars and hunt for intelligence;

- The need for filling jobs and obtaining employment;

- The need for social relationships which one must create or regulate, keeping in mind the displacement of populations, some frustrations expressed in the means of communication, the conflict between cultures and their opposing interests.

These three anxieties are the continual concern of political leaders; they compress their long-term educational and humanistic approach, they impose continual reforms which discourage educational agents and discredit the efforts of those who are in daily contact with children in places of training.

- But at the same time one observes the abandonment of commitments on the part of leaders of poor countries who no longer invest in primary instruction and who are disinterested in the layers of the population from which they cannot expect to receive a profit in the short term.

These policies are criminal: for a long time they have thrown obstacles in the future of entire regions. All the more so because they begin to sacrifice first and foremost the education of girls and women. In effect, the educational policies that have been laid down in favor of girls and women have experienced an undeniable cultural progress and a lasting change.

- To some degree everywhere middle school or secondary school instruction (high school and institute level) is the weak point in educational systems. The children come full of energy and they are bored at these levels; they have the impression that they are wasting their energy while achieving nothing, doing useless exercises for an uncertain future (employment or unemployment?) as they finish their schooling which very often will not provide them the economic means to enter society or to marry and raise a family.

- This is why they settle in a social “no man’s land” that has its

own set of rules, culture, signs, and which feeds into the electronic culture, fashion and music. In that context the school tends to become an unavoidable life space that young people turn to more and more in order to transform it into a place of encounter among friends, a place of interchange, a place of experience. They are able to forget that they are within a place of culture and formation.

- But if they are encouraged by responsible adults, young people learn to make themselves protagonists in their own schooling and education. They long for this because to some degree everywhere, they have a culture of discussion, critique, negotiation. It is possible for them to create within this culture dynamic “positive” educational environments albeit in the measure in which organization, necessary obligations and numerical balance maintain the human dimension.

- Given all this, the great number of students should not be forgotten who -in silence - every day give up middle education, disgusted by structure, by difficult relationships, by a sense of repeated failure and by the uselessness of their existence.

This phenomenon tends to increase in countries where a diploma and social position imperceptibly corrode human relationships. Sometimes this leads to child suicide; often they take their own lives without explanation, leaving parents, friends and teachers abandoned.

All of this expresses a primary truth: everywhere, young people wish to encounter adults. They want to meet educators and persons who are human, not just teachers.

So then, will the job of teacher change naturally? We are not speaking only about giving students a summary of knowledge and information (available in libraries and by means of electronic devices), but of putting into their hands critical instruments for discerning, differentiating, judging, highlighting, choosing...This is the ability that the teacher is called upon to have today. Obviously that teacher will also know how to listen, receive, raise up, integrate and respect. The teacher in this way becomes a mediator of knowledge, respectful of human journeys. Thus the evangelical pedagogy can proceed.

## F. Search for meaning - Doubts - Wisdom

- The freedom of persons and the respect for their free will is a belief which is nearly universal; all countries make reference to it although their practices may be dubious. Nevertheless that belief from the Enlightenment more and more affects the great traditional religious systems and especially those which — like Christianity — have established hierarchies and beliefs.

There is a great mistrust towards these systems and they are designated as free-thinking. All the more reason that it is suspected that they are the ones who promote wars and conflicts in the name of divinities or superior beliefs. And in fact, a superficial examination of the international situation tends to demonstrate that many power, interest and ethnic conflicts have their origins in supposedly religious causes.

- But some hope that the established religions might be a factor for peace and concordance, softening some of the doctrinal, moral and other aspects pertaining to discipline. Religions would therefore be a new inspiring wisdom for “human togetherness”. But many others no longer have these dreams: nothing can be expected from religious systems, but one has to expect everything from individual transformation and the network of good will which inhabit the earth.

Therefore a strong attraction is observed — among the middle and privileged classes — toward like groups, adept at psychological, spiritual and bodily techniques, inspired in former pagan discourses which were believed to have disappeared and about which St. Ireneus of Lyon seemed to have pronounced definitive words. At the same time this reveals a great personal uncertainty, but also an authentic thirst for spirituality.

- This personal uncertainty has its origin in the abandonment of the “great stories”. Now modern man is faced with himself and he searches his very self for meaning which will lift him from himself: he has a taste for the eternal but he is incapable of realizing this by himself.

- Then everyone asks him for help and this upsets him: he is bombarded by different information that gives witness to a multitude of values, ideals, lifestyles that come and go at the beck and call of different styles. His reasoning with its critical, philosophical, theological, scientific equipment...was not prepared for life; there-

fore he no longer has a natural guide to make judgments with a minimal of common sense.

- Many of the more popular religious groups also feel attracted by new, more agile systems which are closer to their existential difficulties. They are looking for a warm atmosphere, security, a close solidarity that will minimize the hard knocks of destiny and the growing insecurity which is the result of various migrations occasioned by poverty, unemployment, exploitation and natural disasters.

- Contrasted with this, the approach of the Catholic Church seems distant, complicated, abstract and focused on problems. In reality its approach is broad-based and it deals with basic problems in detail (life relationships, economic balance, political systems, faith/reason issues, approaches to life, death, work, the unique vocation of the human being, the contribution of religion to “human togetherness”, scientific progress, solidarity...) but this urgent discussion is not sufficiently circulated and neither do thinkers, popular leaders, executive authorities, nor even Christians themselves and especially Christian educators take advantage of this approach.

- Nevertheless societies, one after the other, realize perfectly well that religious sentiment and religious culture have a social role that affects the collective memory of nations but it also affects “human togetherness”. It is a basic challenge if humanity wants to have a future.

Even the more secular societies have shown interest in recent times in the culture of religion and they are reintroducing it in school programs.

- In addition, an important mixture of cultures, strengthened by communication methods, approaches religious systems, becomes familiar with them, compares them and simplifies them. This puts entire populations into a relationship which were formerly thought to be separate, distinct, original. It deals with forms of living and fulfills the encounter between more complete human persons thanks to its more authentic religious practices. True discoveries are made between systems as well as between persons. And little by little religious systems talk to one another and listen to one another. Sometime they irritate one another. But a new way of thinking about other religions is springing up and a new syncretism is being established.

- Finally, many young people who are at the same time critics with regard to the great religious traditional systems, are asking religions about the meaning of life and about its contribution to the universal “human togetherness.”

They enjoy only the religious approaches that respect the individual and his freedom, that have a minimal number of doctrinal and hierarchical rules and that interfere in the least possible way in their personal ethics.

Nevertheless religions, which present model men and women who have clearly surrendered themselves to others, even the very gift of themselves, always produce the same fascination. And in those cases young people are capable of being united to them.

These are the most important conclusions as perceived by the Colloquia Committee. Nevertheless these conclusions cannot achieve their objective (the second proposition from the General Chapter of 1993) if they are not taken again, re-read, dealt with and re-interpreted by each Lasallian community. In effect, if the Institute is **one**, it is also diverse in terms of its local expressions; the mission is the same but the children and young people we meet are distinct; global analysis can help us to observe better the current educational landscape, but our specific responses depend on our own environments. **For this reason this Bulletin of the Institute is above all a working instrument.**

**(The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and Education today,  
Five colloquia towards a more informed understanding,  
Bulletin of the Institute, no. 245, pag.113-121 )**

## The mission today: urgency and hope

### I. The educational service of the poor

#### Observations

1. From its foundation, the Institute has defined itself as being called by God to the educational service of the poor. During the last thirty years this need has been regularly recalled. (Circular 403 of 1976; 1978 Letter of Brother Superior General; 1981 Inter-Capitular meeting; 1986 General Chapter; Circular 435 (42rd General Chapter); Declaration Nos. 28-2, 30-3, 32-1, 34-4).

In the past as now, the Institute has always concerned itself and continues to concern itself with the educational service of the poor. (Intercom #112)

We need to remember, however, that the question of the educational service of the poor is closely tied to social, cultural and economic contexts, which vary greatly from country to country where the Institute is present.

Despite this, a certain feeling of dissatisfaction exists among some Brothers, in particular among younger Brothers. The Institute is not perceived sufficiently clearly as being dedicated to the educational service of the poor. A discrepancy exists between what we profess and what we do. This concern has manifested itself in the central theme of the present Chapter.

2. What are the causes of this discrepancy?

- The need to continue with what we have inherited from the recent past, which has bequeathed establishments to us which, with time, may have forgotten, and made the Brothers forget, the original purpose of their foundation.

- This has made it difficult to reconcile involvement with the poor

and the necessary financial management of establishments, above all in countries which do not receive any government assistance. Moreover, the Institute must respond to requests from local Churches and ensure a presence, as for example, in the area of university education.

- The fact that, while the educational service of the poor calls for a constant conversion of heart and of lifestyle, the Brothers' lifestyle has become increasingly middle class, and this has moved them away from the living standards of the poor.

- The option for the poor involves Lasallian Associates who choose to adopt it. It is the responsibility of the Brothers to make them aware of this option, while respecting their right to adopt different lifestyles.

## Guidelines

We are aware that our educational service of the poor cannot presume to solve all the problems of poverty in the world, but only specifically those which are related to education.

We wish to follow, as a group, the path which leads to the poor, acknowledging that God calls us to bring creative and generous responses to the world of the poor today, through fidelity to our founding charism.

We acknowledge the associative dimension of the Institute in which Brothers and Partners are involved together in initiatives and programmes to achieve the purpose of the Institute.

1. It is necessary to promote, over the next seven years, the evolution of our educational establishments, so that they may be genuinely dedicated to the service of the poor. Each of them will have to respond to the need for evolution in a different way, but we think that the following appear to be the characteristics which will allow us to identify a work as Lasallian in respect to the educational service of the poor .

— adopting an educational programme on justice and solidarity which will give a specific direction to the activities undertaken, to the experiences proposed to the young people, and to the kind of relationships that are built up;

— thinking of ways (facilities, and pedagogical strategies) to make these centres accessible and effective for young people in difficulty;

— creating ways so that poor youth and their families feel welcome and at ease in our institutions.

2. Personal conversion and a profound experience of God on the part of Lasallians (Brothers and Partners) should be the motive force behind the process of drawing closer to the world of the poor in order to allow ourselves "to be evangelized by them." This openness to the evangelization by the poor implies bringing about gradually, as an Institute and with Associates, a change in the "social standing" of communities and establishments, so as to come closer to the poor and share their condition.

3. The educational service of the poor presupposes a process of awareness-training and specific formation. Consequently, a process has to be set in motion to raise the awareness of Brothers and Associates, and to train them. This process should concentrate on the factors which engender different kinds of poverty, and bring to light the root causes. To help in this process, the Centre of the Institute should adopt a clear position in this matter and communicate it to the Brothers, to the Lasallian world and, further afield, to the Church and society as a whole.

4. The Institute does not presume that it alone has an effective educational approach and strategy to deal with present forms of poverty. This is why it considers it important to maintain relations and to collaborate with other organizations and other agencies (political, social, and religious) that work to resolve urgent problems regarding the poor at the local, regional, and international level. Within the Institute, in order to respond to the urgent situations of poverty among the young, subsidiarity, interdependence and authority at the Centre of the Institute need to act in harmony.

### *Recommendation 6*

*As a way of encouraging personal and community conversion, each District sets up a structure which will enable Brothers and communities to examine to what extent they live as persons of modest means, and have contact with such persons (living standard, kinds of relationships, access to communities and schools, involvement in social and educational activities). It evaluates also how the concern for the educational service of the poor influences the way it administers its goods.*

### *Recommendation 7*

*Each District will draw up a plan to offer formation, and increase awareness of new forms of poverty affecting young people, especially in its own country. This plan will involve the participation of young people, parents, Partners and Brothers. This plan should include also direct experience of working with and for the poor. After 3 years, an evaluation will be made at the District level, and the results will be published at an Institute level.*

### *Recommendation 8*

*The General Chapter urges those in positions of responsibility at all levels of the Institute to strengthen relations and collaboration with organizations which defend the poor and especially the rights of children, and which promote their education.*

### **Proposition 12**

**In order to increase the educational service of the poor, the General Chapter asks Visitors of Districts and Sub-Districts, Delegates and Presidents of Delegations, and their Councils, to evaluate the degree to which the institutions of the District, Sub-District or Delegation contribute to the educational service of the poor. The analysis of this evaluation should lead to a plan of action, drawn up with the participation of Lasallian Associates, within three years at the most. The evaluation and the plan of action will be the object of a report, which will be studied at a later date at a meeting between Visitors, Delegates, Presidents and the Brother Superior General and his Council.**

## **II. Evangelization**

“God is so good that having created us, he wishes all of us to come to the knowledge of the truth... and you are the ones whom God has chosen to help in this work by announcing to these children the Good News and the truths that are contained in it” (Meditation 193).

### **Observations**

Some young people have difficulty in accepting the Good News that we announce. Their environment is characterized by a secu-

larised “global youth culture,” which is based upon questionable commercial and economic values, and which prevents long-term relationships and stable commitments. If true dialogue is to take place, we must know more about these young people, and use language and forms of expression they understand.

While we are prepared to see what is good in other cultures, we must, nevertheless, seek to introduce the values of the Good News into the social environment of young people, so that family life is strengthened, and both the socially and economically disadvantaged, such as the illiterate or the homeless, and those experiencing new forms of poverty, such as those lacking affection, faith or meaning, are liberated.

Teaching is becoming more difficult every day. Parents also have to face the challenge posed by the great diversity and complexity of life today. The admirable commitment of numerous men and women, Brothers and Partners, old and young, working together in the Lasallian mission on behalf of the young and the poor, is increasingly an urgent need. Furthermore, we are glad to see that more women are now involved in the Lasallian mission, and are playing a more significant part in it.

The good example given by credible, authentic, and coherent witnesses is the best means of sharing the Good News. This example is most effective when given by a team or by a community of persons, such as a community of Brothers, Sisters, Catechists or a community of lay persons. Besides the implicit proclamation of the Good News, we must also make this proclamation explicit by such means as public expressions of faith, the catechesis and pastoral care of young people, and the vocations ministry.

For Lasallian establishments to be the living expression of the Good News, they must be places for dialogue in truth, freedom, and hope. In this way, the Brothers and Lasallian Partners can enter into the culture of the young to announce the Good News, and feel the need themselves for continual conversion. Among Lasallian institutions, the school is an ideal place for an inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue which will bear witness to the values of all forms of faith. Lasallians working in universities have the opportunity to contribute to our mission, in a special way, by their commitment to research in the field of the faith development of young people, whatever their religion, and by the training and

accompaniment of those persons entrusted with the difficult task of sharing the Good News in an increasingly secularized and multi-religious context.

The Lasallian charism is already a source of inspiration in the context of multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Young people from all cultures and religious traditions have the right and freedom to benefit from, and to live according to the Lasallian charism.

For many young people, there is a widening gap between themselves and the institutional Church. The Lasallian school becomes the place where they experience the message of the Good News in a way that touches their hearts, their needs, and their concerns.

The sharing of the Good News is more credible and more authentic when the young and their educators are in solidarity with the poor in the pursuit of justice. In this context young people are able to perceive the vocational call to commit themselves to the Lasallian mission, including as a Brother of the Christian Schools.

Many experiences around the world suggest that a good formula for faith development is one that integrates religious education, service, and community. To neglect any one of these three defeats the aim of the whole process.

#### *Recommendation 9*

*That each Lasallian, each Lasallian group and each Lasallian programme of renewal or formation adopt the following guiding principles:*

- *FAITH sharing (this makes possible inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue),*
- *SERVICE of the poor through education,*
- *COMMUNITY building.*

#### **Proposition 13**

**That each Region, District, Sub-District, and Delegation, urged on by the person responsible for the sector, establish, either independently or jointly with other sectors, a commission to provide reflection, leadership and coordination for organisations which, in our institutions, work with and for young people. This commission, having in view the faith development and apostolic commitment of young people, will be responsible for:**

- **directing and coordinating structures responsible for the pastoral ministry of youth,**
  - **creating and running Lasallian youth groups,**
  - **providing initial and continuing formation for those accompanying youth groups.**
- During the course of the year 2003, this commission will report to Brother Superior General and provide an evaluation regarding what it has accomplished.**

### III. Urgent education needs

#### Introduction

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, like many other people and organisations, is clearly and patently aware of the urgent need that children, young people and adults have for education, at the beginning of this new century. Faithful to the original inspiration of St. John Baptist de La Salle, it has spoken of this on numerous occasions in recent years, and particularly in the following documents, which are the fruit of the first-hand experience of Lasallians, and of consultation with international organisations which work resolutely to promote education:

- *Circular 435 of the General Chapter of 1993, pp 18 - 29;*
- *the letter of the Superior General of January 1999;*
- *the Report on the 5 colloquia, June 1999;*
- *the Report of Bro. Superior to the 43rd General Chapter, p 19, 95.*

Given this educational need, the Commission proposes to strengthen the commitment of the Institute, for the next seven years, in the following four areas where the need is particularly urgent:

- the Rights of the Child,
- educational renewal
- the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, where this possible
- Lasallian presence in multi-religious societies.

Lasallian centres of higher education should bring their own specific strengths to bear on these urgent issues through their programmes of research and professional training.

# 1. The Rights of the Child

## Observations

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is an internationally ratified agreement to oppose the exploitation of children and young people. Although the Convention was recommended by the 42nd. General Chapter (Circular 435, p.23, 2.1), and again in the Pastoral Letter of the Superior for 1999, its contents are little known and understood by Brothers and Partners.

Cultural norms are not always consistent with the articles of the Convention.

Children often are not sufficiently aware of their rights under the Convention.

## Guidelines

1. Brothers and Partners need to be more aware of the contents of the Convention.
2. The implementation of the Convention has to be adapted to local conditions.
3. The Lasallian educational mission should concentrate on children whose rights are not protected.
4. The response of the Brothers and Partners to the demands of the Convention must be inspired by Gospel values.

## Proposition 14

**In order that the rights of the child be considered as a major focus of concern for the Lasallian mission of education during the next seven years, each District, Sub-District and Delegation should include this question in its plan of action. It will appoint at least one Brother or Partner who will help it:**

- to cooperate with local organisations which work for the promotion of the rights of the child
- to detect local violations of the rights of children;
- to alert local authorities when children's rights are violated;
- to ensure that its schools and universities teach and observe the rights of the child;

**- to maintain contact with the secretariat for the educational mission.**

**This project will be evaluated periodically.**

# 2. Educational renewal

## Acknowledgment

The Chapter acknowledges and values highly the educational work of the 68,000 Brothers, teachers and educators who, together and throughout the Institute, are an educative influence by being present among their pupils and students "from morning till night." It urges them to continue exercising their ministry with great dynamism. It addresses this encouragement, especially, to those who face great difficulties at the present time, in particular in their attempts to introduce educational renewal.

### *Recommendation 10*

*That Districts and Regions organise continuing formation programmes for Brothers and Lasallian Associates and partners, which will enable them to respond positively to the rapid, profound and worldwide changes that affect modern society.*

### *Recommendation 11*

*That during the intercapitular period, all Lasallian establishments stress in their educational programmes the following characteristics which should identify them clearly as being ours:*

- *the sense of community and fraternity as a response to individualism and loss of identity;*
- *the fight against poverty and situations of injustice;*
- *education for justice and peace, tolerance and solidarity;*
- *formation of persons who are both just and free.*

*Brother Visitor and his Council will require every Lasallian establishment to draw up concrete plans for providing opportunities for first-hand experience inspired by these characteristics, and they will evaluate the organisation of these schemes and their results.*

### *Recommendation 12*

*In order to give a concrete response to the educational needs of the poor, over the next 7 years, the Institute, at its various levels,*

*should undertake new projects in the field of literacy in rural and urban areas (primary schools, evening courses, correspondence courses, radio broadcast courses). The initiative could be taken by Brothers and/or Lasallian Associates and partners. It could also be an apostolate for Lasallian Volunteers.*

#### **Proposition 15**

**That, in the course of the next 2 years, the Institute Secretariat for the Educational Mission, using current means of communication, establish a network of Brothers and Lasallian Partners; that this network be in contact with competent centres within the Institute, and with organisations outside.**

**The purpose of this network will be to share information, ideas and research, particularly in the following areas:**

- the rights of the child;
  - the means for developing educational communities which are fraternal and rooted in the Gospel;
  - experiences and projects to promote justice and peace, the service of the poor and literacy;
  - pedagogical innovation, schemes for educating and evangelising.
- The secretariat for the educational mission will take the appropriate means to ensure the effective communication of this information and research to Lasallian educators.**

**The Commission suggests the following approach:**

**Regarding the priority concerns mentioned above, the secretariat for the educational mission could call on particularly competent Brothers and Partners and other experts. It would establish working teams with members spread around the Lasallian world, dealing with assigned priority concerns.**

**These persons would agree to form themselves into a kind of “temporary association” to work on the chosen priority concern, and would meet from time to time at the invitation of the secretariat, and at its expense. Obviously, these persons would set up their own network of experts locally, making use of the possibilities offered by non-Lasallian organisations. This approach would make it possible to practice Lasallian association in a new and flexible way.**

### **3. Explicit proclamation of the faith**

#### **References**

- Rule 12, 15, 15a, 15b, 15c
- Declaration 38, 40, 532
- Pastoral Letter of Brother Superior, January 1997
- Report of the Brother Superior General to the 43rd General Chapter, p. 19, prop. 32

#### **Observations**

1. The explicit proclamation of the Good News poses problems in all continents:
  - either because of the multi-religious context,
  - either because of dechristianization, secularism and unbelief.
2. When the explicit announcement of the Good News is imposed rather than proposed it fails to elicit a positive response among young people. They feel that they are not being respected.
3. The explicit announcement of the Good News is carried out through religion lessons during scheduled school hours and through extracurricular pastoral activities.
4. There are many resources available throughout the Institute. We are aware of the continuing effort needed to adapt the language of these materials to today’s young people.
5. The majority of those engaged in faith formation in our works are our Lasallian Partners. They have been very generous in their commitment but many are discouraged by the lack of response from those whom they teach. In spite of difficulties, they are remarkably devoted. This shows itself in their request for training and the setting up of courses in religious education.

#### **Guidelines**

1. The Chapter calls on the Brothers and Partners to renew their commitment to the catechetical mission and their specific formation in this domain.

2. Since acceptance of faith is a free act, the explicit announcement of the Good News should be proposed to all. In this way constructive dialogue can be established.

3. Given the new forms of communication, Brothers and Partners ought to be creative in proclaiming the Good News. In this connection, it is important:

- to gain access to the world of young people and their culture, which includes Gospel values;
- to be open-minded regarding other youth movements not organised by Lasallians.

#### **Proposition 16**

**That, before the end of 2001, every Regional Coordinator, in coordination with those responsible for Districts, Sub-Districts and Delegations, establish a Commission for the stimulation and education of faith, whose task will be:**

- to study ways and means of adapting our language and our methods of educating in the faith to the culture of young people in the 21st century;
- to share information about existing projects as well as available resources so as to help and encourage Brothers and partners involved in faith education;
- to find ways of including in school programmes and/or in pastoral programmes social activities to help the poor;
- to offer practical suggestions regarding the training and guidance of Brothers and partners involved in faith education.

**Periodically, and at least every three years, this commission will evaluate its work with the Regional Coordinator and the Visitors.**

## 4. Lasallian presence in multi-religious societies

### References

- Report of the Br. Superior General to the 43rd General Chapter, pp 92-95.
- The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A

### Shared Mission

- Institute Bulletin Nos. 243 and 245
- Circular 435, Reflections on the Missionary Policy of the Institute
- “Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflections and Guidelines Regarding Inter-Faith Dialogue” (Rome, May 19th, 1991).

### Observations

1. The Lasallian Mission is already being pursued in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.
2. In these societies, Brothers and Partners experience a wide range of reactions to their presence, ranging from intolerance to indifference on the one hand, to respect often, on the other.
3. The work of the Institute in this multi-religious context is not well known in other parts of the Institute.

### Guidelines

The presence of the Institute in multi-religious societies requires inter-religious dialogue on the following levels:

- a. Life: Brothers and Partners and the young people build individual friendships and develop fraternity transcending religious differences.
- b. School: a meeting place where the young person of whatever religious belief, is a subject, It remains a source of human and religious education by prioritizing the educational service of the poor.
- c. Service: in serving the poor, Brothers, Partners and the young find a solidarity that unites them despite their religious differences.
- d. Institutional: entering into inter-religious dialogue at national and international gatherings.

### *Recommendation 13*

*That the Superior General and his Council include among their priorities the promotion of the Lasallian Mission in multi-religious societies by:*

— fostering the exchange of information on the situation, condition, orientations and initiatives of the Brothers and Partners working in those societies, particularly those that are related to the educational service of the poor,  
— ensuring the representation of the Institute at international inter-religious meetings and events.

(2000: 43rd General Chapter  
Circ. 447 p.19-33)

## Associated to respond to the challenges of the 21st century

### I. Associated for the educational service of the poor

#### Observations

##### 1. Association in the present world

It is clear that societies are taking people and their hopes increasingly into account. More and more, each day, concerned individuals and groups seek to take the future into their own hands and to influence the course of events, by expressing their opinions and making decisions in areas which concern them. It has been noted that, in most parts of the world, large organisations such as NGOs, especially those which promote education and the rights of children, are linked to numerous associations.

For its part, the Church is trying to promote a broader concept of the Kingdom of God, one in which each person becomes aware - both through his own and other traditions, history, culture and hopes - that he or she is a son or daughter of the same Creator, a member of the same family, called to take part with others in building up a Kingdom of God in which all will see themselves as sons and daughters of God.

The Church is very interested in Christians who work on behalf of their brothers and sisters, and who wish to do so in the 'Areopagus' (VC 96-99) where previously only religious congregations were present. The Church recognises the action of the Spirit in this and gives its support.

##### 2. Lasallian association

Association has existed since the origins of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, but has developed in an altogether unprecedented way during the past forty years. The foundation event

which links the Institute today to its origins is that of June 6th 1694, when John Baptist de La Salle and twelve of his followers came together to consecrate themselves for life, to the Christian education of poor boys. The link between this foundation act of association and the growing interest in association in the Institute today can be clearly seen in the following chronological sequence:

— The 39th General Chapter reminded the Institute “that working with the poor is an integral part of the finality of the Institute” (D 28.2). The association of the Brothers is a response to this demand. The Brothers are conscious of this, and Partners will discover this gradually.

— The 40th General Chapter made a serious study of its origins and attached great importance to this vow of association. This coincided with the consecration of the first members of *Signum Fidei*.

— The 41st General Chapter addressed itself to the Lasallian Family, thereby recognising thousands of persons who were contributing to the mission.

— The 42nd General Chapter treated the theme of Shared Mission and spoke of Partners. For the first time, Consultants had the right to speak at a Chapter.

During this same period, more or less everywhere, the formation being given developed a certain expectation in Partners who, not satisfied with being simply collaborators, wished to share in the spiritual heritage of the Institute, and have a place in the Lasallian mission as volunteers or Associates.

This present-day movement towards association obliges Capitulants and Consultants to examine what is happening on an international level, and lay down a number of guidelines for the future. Since we know that life is more dynamic than any definition or constraint, what we need, at the present moment at least, is a minimum framework which allows us to say clearly both who is associated today with the Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education, and how. This is the purpose of the following guidelines for individuals and groups.

## Guidelines

The development of the Lasallian Mission requires the Institute to allow itself to be stimulated by the dynamism apparent among partners and associates, and to encourage and support collaboration among themselves and with the Brothers, so that all can deepen their own understanding of association, in the light of the observations made, the Lasallian charism and the present theology of the Church.

This guideline is evidently dependent on how persons and groups function vis-a-vis the Lasallian charism and their involvement in the Lasallian mission. That is why, at the outset, we define “who is who.”

### **The Institute of the Brothers Of the Christian Schools**

The Institute is the first form of association desired by St. John Baptist de La Salle. The original vow for the service of the poor, which associated the Founder with twelve Brothers in 1694, is the source of Lasallian associations of lay persons and religious who wish to be part of the Lasallian Mission. This is where new forms of association for the mission have their origin.

In the light of this, the Brothers need to question themselves continually on how, in practice, they are associated among themselves, so that this association may be a source of nourishment for them, and stimulate their growth as persons, their solidarity with others, and their listening to what God says about the community mission, the educational service of the poor, the reason for their association.

This has consequences for their lifestyle, relationships, fidelity and their various loyalties.

### **Partners**

There are Partners who in fact share our mission in its multiple educational, catechetical, apostolic and professional aspects, and make it possible for the mission to be accomplished. They collaborate with conviction for the time they are with us.

We need to reflect on the process they need to follow to become Associates, if they so wish.

### **Associates**

There are partners who have a long record of collaborating in the Lasallian Mission, and who feel a call to deepen the charism, spir-

ituality and Lasallian communion in which they wish to participate. In particular, their lives are already marked by a number of distinctively Lasallian characteristics:

- a vocation inspired by the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values;
- a life of faith which discovers God in everyday life understood in the light of Scripture and, for persons of other religions, in the light of their own sacred texts;
- a community experience of some form or other suited to the identity of its members;
- a mission of some duration which associates persons with the educational service of the poor;
- an openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment.

Given this, there are many different ways of living in association: as individuals and as groups.

#### *A) Individuals.*

For some persons who are involved in the mission, sharing tasks and responsibilities is a truly personal response to an interior call which they feel, and which motivates them to give their time, to accept formation, to share, and to listen to Lasallian appeals for commitment to the service of young people in difficulty. By mutual agreement they may eventually be associated with a community of Brothers or a District, depending on their type of commitment. Perhaps they are already part of a process which will lead them, later on, to join an intentional group, if they so desire.

In certain cases these persons, if they so wish, and at their request, may express a desire to be associated in a more formal way with the Institute. It is for the Brother Visitor and his Council to recognise these persons as Associates.

#### *B) Intentional Lasallian groups.*

We call groups 'intentional' when their members, in response to an interior call, come together voluntarily to practise some aspects of Lasallian life, each group choosing a particular type of life and the length of their members' commitment. For this to be considered an intentional Lasallian group there are three necessary conditions:

- that some aspects of Lasallian practice are clearly visible;
- that there is a clear commitment to young people and the poor;

— that the Visitor and his Council have authenticated it in an official document for a prescribed time.

An analysis of the present situation leads us to recognise a number of intentional Lasallian groups:

- those which have their autonomy and proper recognition independently of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. This is the case of the Institutes of the Guadalupanas Sisters of De La Salle, the Lasallian Sisters of Vietnam and the Catechists of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate;
- those which are structurally linked with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: *Signum Fidei* and the Lasallian Third Order.

#### *C) Other intentional groups.*

In the medium term, we think that it is possible that a number of other intentional groups will be founded.

In fact, these groups already exist, although they may have no juridical structure. They exist because their members have developed links and relationships, and have adopted projects, and have done so with explicit reference to the Lasallian charism which they share. If they so wished, they could envisage becoming intentional groups.

Such a request could come from a whole variety of groups. There could include, among others: Lasallian teams, teams of educators and teachers, joining forces temporarily to respond to the specific needs encountered by young people in difficulty, Christian Lasallian communities, volunteers, Lasallian Youth, young people doing missionary work, former pupils, parents of students...

We should note that in the composition of these groups one can meet Brothers, other Christians, members of other religions, and persons of good will whose point of reference, as the 42nd General Chapter indicates, is the "human and spiritual values recognized and pursued by lived by all Lasallians- meditation, service of the poor, the family, human rights, the rights of children...". (Circular 435, p.43.)

Consequently, we recognise as being associated with the Lasallian mission all intentional groups and all persons who respond to an interior call by an educational commitment which has Lasallian characteristics, and which has been authenticated by a competent authority.

Together, these persons and groups are associated with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in order to respond, in a complementary manner, to the demands of the Lasallian Mission. The charism inspiring this mission was given to Saint John Baptist de La Salle, and was authenticated by the Church, for the service of young people.

This imposes on the Brothers of the Christian Schools some obligations with regard to the process of accompaniment and formation of Associates.

#### *Recommendation 1*

*In the light of the guidelines of the 43rd General Chapter each Region, District, Sub-District, and Delegation promotes the association of Partners and/or Associates and Brothers, and of Partners and/or Associates among themselves, to reflect on their identities as associates, and to develop forms of association for the Lasallian Mission.*

#### *Recommendation 2*

*The Institute has extensive educational experience of working with young people and educators professing other faiths. We ask that more serious thought be given in the Institute to the way in which we share the Lasallian charism with educators and young people who are of other faiths. That the Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts and Delegations concerned establish groups to study this question.*

#### *Recommendation 3*

*That our Institute continue to develop its collaboration at all levels with the Institutes of the Guadalupanas Sisters of De La Salle, the Lasallian Sisters of Vietnam and the Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate, who share Lasallian spirituality and the Lasallian mission.*

#### **Proposition 1**

**In order to encourage and support the development of Lasallian association for the educational service of the poor: that, in the next seven years, each Region, District, Sub-District, and Delegation decide on practical steps to promote the creation and development of groups of Partners and/or Associates and of Brothers, as well as of Partners and/or Associates among themselves, which will reflect on their identity in the context of the Lasallian mission, and to develop forms of association.**

#### **Proposition 2**

**That Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations set up study groups on our way of sharing the Lasallian charism with educators and young people of other faiths.**

#### **Proposition 3**

**That Brother Superior General and his Council in consultation with the Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts and Delegations organise an international meeting of Brothers, Partners and Associates, around the year 2004, with a view to:**

- sharing experiences of association;
- analysing and evaluating the implementation of the process of association; and,
- presenting plans of action for the next General Chapter.

**That after this meeting, the Centre of the Institute publish a report describing the experiences of association that are most original and significant.**

( 2000: 43rd General Chapter  
Circ. 447 p. 1-8 )