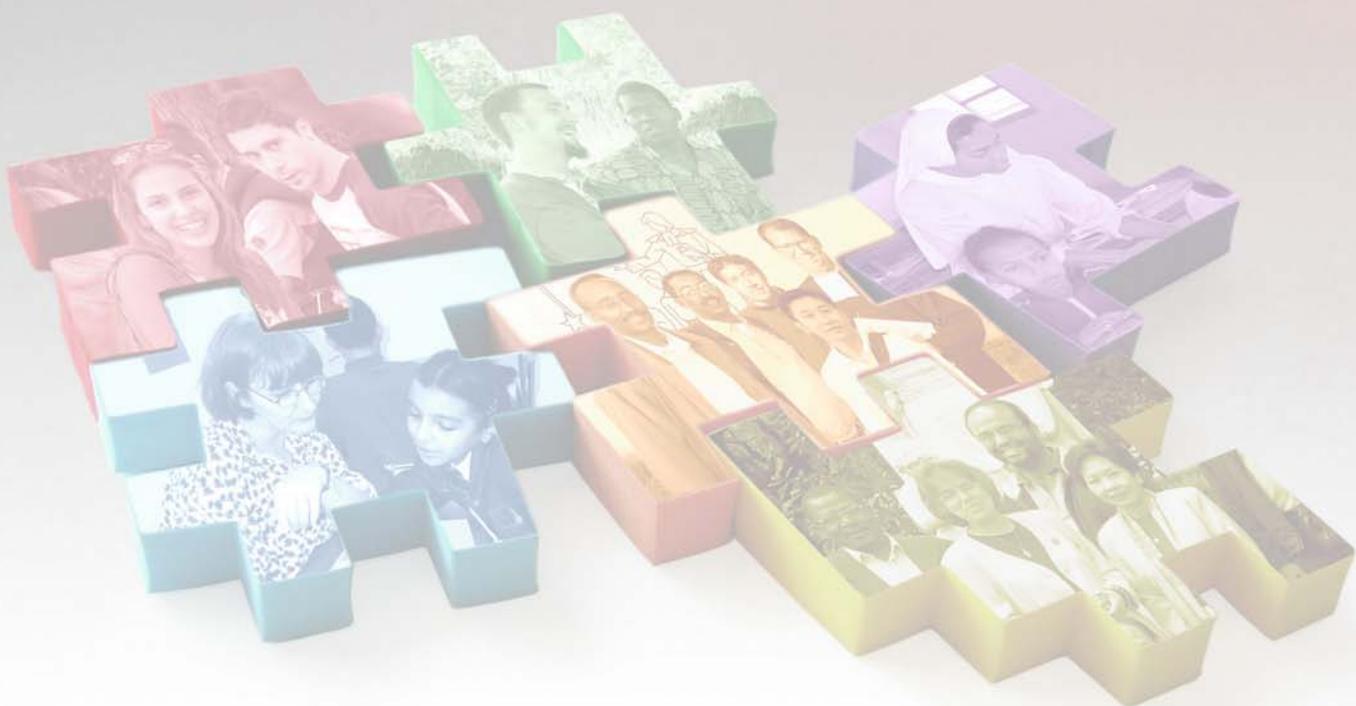


Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission



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Introduction

Since the origins of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, “association,” more than a structure, has been a force that has “united” us in the process of sustaining and realizing the mission together, the mission for which God has “called, consecrated, and sent” us. “Associated for mission,” over the course of three centuries, we Brothers have lived the mystery of our lay vocation in the world and in the Church for the educational service of the abandoned and the poor.

“Association,” in our time, has had an unforeseen and surprising growth and development, especially during the past 40 years. The 43rd General Chapter (2000) invited us to recognize those who, not being Brothers, are already connected as “associates” with the Institute. At the same time, a horizon is opening for us to explore, in the midst of a growing number of men and women with whom we share the mission, the opportunity, and the grace to respond more authentically to God’s call to proclaim the Gospel to the excluded, the marginalized, to abandoned children and young people who live without hope.

The close relationship that can exist between this growing number of men and women of the 21st century who identify themselves as “associated for mission,” and that “first association” in the founding event in 17th century France, is one of the most surprising and exciting events for us today, and at the same time it raises questions for us. Where is the Spirit leading us in this new millennium?

This Bulletin 250 invites us to let ourselves be surprised, to welcome enthusiastically the great diversity of experiences in association that many Brothers and lay colleagues live day in and day out in shared mission. It also invites us to question ourselves about the “new places” where the Spirit is leading us.

During the Congress called by the Unions of Superiors General (UISG and USG) in November 2004 in Rome, on the future of religious life in the new millennium, there was talk of “wells” and “roads”. Wells where we have mysterious encounters, such as the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4) and roads where we find those who are suffering, such as the parable about the good Samaritan (Luke 11).

We consecrated persons were invited to consider the reality that we know in today’s world, our difficulties and joys, obstacles that slow us down and opportunities that energize us, in light of those two “Biblical icons”: the encounter of the Samaritan woman with Jesus and the Samaritan man finding the suffering human being. Instead of a theology of perfection, which is separatist and elitist, this Biblical story invites us to read the life of consecrated persons as life of wells and roads, a life of encounters with God and with those who suffer. The experience of the Passion for Christ and the Passion for those who suffer. These wells are not exclusive to those who live religious consecration in the Church. This reading is also aimed at all those who are listening to the mysterious call of Jesus, those who follow him in the concrete context of their family and professional lives in educational service.

In fact, throughout the Bible, we find many men and women of faith who embark on the road, many times in total darkness. They have lived liminal experiences which reveal the mysterious action of God at many wells scattered along the roads they travel. At those wells they have made pacts, covenants, and marriage vows. Along those roads they have freed the enslaved, they have healed the wounded, they have embarked on a new life.

We, too, in our different continents and in our time, are invited to get on the road, to sit near wells. In those places we find and we listen to the irresistible word that surfaces, especially from



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the well of those who suffer. From those wells we allow ourselves to be drawn by the unforeseeable force of hope.

This is how we urge you to read this Bulletin: to sit down near the wells that appear in the new expressions of association: in fraternities of consecrated life, in personal and group journeys. The stories that describe those wells come close to the places and roads where these men and women have lived the original fire of the Passion of God for the poor. These are new wells of renewed hope that give them the power to commit themselves to the mission of serving, by means of education, those children and young people who need it most.

We invite you also to consider the roads that lead to Association: the openness of the Brothers towards the new associates, and their efforts in guaranteeing the transfer of the charism, being the heart and the memory of the charism within the Lasallian family; the formative journeys that bring us closer to the founding well and the spirituality that sprang up from it; participation in and responsibility for the mission, about which we offer many examples, is a condition for going forward on the road of Association, Brothers and lay colleagues.

It is clear that this Bulletin cannot identify all the “wells and roads” that we experience in the Lasallian Family. Those that are presented here, nevertheless, reveal already that there are “new places” from which the force of hope springs forth with unforeseen innovation which gives us the power to proclaim the Gospel to the poor. And, in this way, our horizons are opened.

This horizon invites us to dream, not simply by repeating formulas from the past, but by inventing Lasallian Association of the new millennium with boldness and creativity. The new District of Associates is birthing. The new “rainbow” of an Association that finds its foundation in Church-communion in which all of us, Brothers and lay colleagues, are united in the mission. Finally, we urge you not to separate this reflection on Association and associates from the concrete context of the educational mission that we share. In fact, this Bulletin proves to us that Association does not exist for itself. On the contrary, its reason for being, its strength lies in the irresistible Passion for Christ and Passion for children and young people who energize the lives of those who have been associating themselves with the Church throughout the centuries.

“Our roads and our wells” are organically connected “to the original road and well” of the first associates who let themselves be embraced by that original fire in the 17th century. By means of those origins, we also are reconnected to the founding event of the Church: the Passion that awakened the apostolic community gathered around Jesus through the Spirit to proclaim the Gospel to the poor.



**1. Lasallian
association:
a rainbow**

Lasallian association: a rainbow

I. Between the origins and today

I.1 The Beginning of the Story

The story of Lasallian Association already has a history of three and one-quarter centuries. We can represent this as a rainbow whose ends are anchored, one in the time of our foundation, the other in the present in which we live. The light circulates in both directions. Our present helps us to read that foundational event and to discover the message that is reserved for us. And our present is also filled again with new meaning as we read it in light of our founding story.

Like all collective stories, ours began with an oral tradition. Before the Founder would put into written form what he and the first Brothers were experiencing, the story had already passed from mouth to mouth. Those who heard it were informed then that in Reims and the neighboring towns, and later in Paris and other cities, a group of school-teachers were doing wonderful things for children, the chil-

dren of artisans and the poor. And the children were saying that they felt at ease in those schools, because the schools were for them, but at the same time these schools were not reserved for the poor alone, but they were open to whoever wanted to attend. Therefore, the story soon shifted to speak about the problems which the Founder of that group was having with the courts in Paris, and not because of committing his schools for the poor, but because of denying that they were exclusively for them.

Nevertheless, the most striking thing about that group of teachers is the fact that they lived in community. And they did this in spite of the fact that external signs, such as the habit or the uniform they wore, had absolutely no relationship with anything that was then known about religious life, and the vows that some began to make were not the classic vows of religious life.

Furthermore, the most evident fact of their community life was underscored by the choice of the name by which they called themselves: *Brothers of the Christian Schools*. The story, then, was about a fraternity dedication to the education of the poor. And it was about a fraternity that was built “conscientiously,” not as a simple means for work. Its members spent time and effort in living in community, and they did not accept any school that would not allow them to live in community.

I.2 The Story Continues

Before continuing to listen to the story of the origins, let us jump over the rainbow to the other end, the present. This is not for the purpose of seeing “how the story ends,” since this story does not end in our present time, but to see if this is about the same story, even though there is such a great distance between one end and the other. And we can say that yes, we can confirm that the story is the same.

We find, on one hand, the same core story: an eagerness to respond effectively to the educational needs of the poor and to do this in light of the Gospel. Throughout the Lasallian world innovative contributions to education are occurring. Sensitivity to new situations of poverty is causing a renewal of educational ministries in Districts.

But what seems to us to be most striking is the underlying fabric which supports all of this educational and pastoral creativity, that it is not the solitary initiative of some out-



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standing people, but the strength of the fraternity - from traditional communities of Brothers to new communities of lay Lasallians, and others made up of laity and Brothers. It is through all of them that the Lasallian charism is causing a dynamism of communion in favor of the Lasallian mission.

2. The message of the origins

2.1 Mission Summons Communion

From the very beginning of the Lasallian story a call is heard. It is a cry that comes from “children of the artisans and the poor,” and it is chanted by all children and young people who are in need of education. The cry does not abate throughout the entire narrative; in reality it is sustaining the story, it puts into action its protagonists and it attracts new actors to participate in the story. We can see to it that the story will end when that cry is no longer heard.

The cry is perceived as a call, and it is here where the Lasallian charism comes in, which awakens feeling in the heart, trains the ears of the story's actors, and awakens in them the responses that knit the whole story together.

The Lasallian charism, that is to say, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit among us, is the authentic protagonist in the Lasallian story, even though he might be in the shadows. Moved by him, the visible actors, beginning with the Founder himself, become sensitive to those cries and they interpret them as calls, but not as calls to set up schools for the poor, but to create a fraternity which supports the schools. The actors in the Lasallian story have grasped what it is that the poor need, not simply “schools,” but a fraternity that teaches a way of life, the Gospel way of life; therefore, their response will consist in setting up a fraternity that is capable of providing schools where the intellectual content and skills are incorporated in a suggestion to live in solidarity. It is this response that will allow the life of the poor to be transformed and raised up, and it is the response of the Gospel.

The charismatic dynamism that allowed for the development of the Lasallian story and which continues to give life today, we can discover in a very simple way in these terms of post-conciliar theology: *Mission summons communion*; or, better still, with this phrase from John Paul II: “*Communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission*” (*Christifideles Laici*, 32).

2.2 A Project of Fraternity

“*One commitment led me to another that I had not anticipated at the beginning*” (Memoir on the Beginnings, Blain 1, 166-169). That is how Saint John Baptist de La Salle describes his progressive discovery of the call and his involvement, which was also progressive, in the response. John Baptist began to hear the cry of the “children of artisans and the poor” through Adrien Nyel and the teachers he had hired. But it took him a while to interpret the call.

At the beginning he thought that it was about organizing schools, for which he would prepare teams of teachers that would function in an orderly fashion. And he administered the enterprise from the outside, from a distance. But as the distance decreased he went on to discover what the call was about: it was not only a matter of effectiveness, but one of solidarity, which demanded his being alongside persons, next to the teachers. The most decisive step, but not the final one, came in 1682, when John Baptist left his home and went to live with the teachers. It was then that the experience of community began. In community he discovered that it was not enough to “be with them,” but that he should “be like them,” as was recommended by Father Nicolas Barré, and he went on to give up his canonry and his wealth.

The true Lasallian response to the call of the poor began then, in this lay community, without hierarchical differences, which was developing a project of fraternity. The date of reference is 1684. The name that they chose to be known as, *Brothers of the Christian Schools*, describes very well this *communion for the mission* that would be the central dynamic of the Lasallian community.

- First of all, it shows the type of relationships which they want to create among themselves; it is a project of fraternity, a project of communion among equals, that has as its model the picture which Saint Luke draws for us in the Acts of the Apostles about the way in which the first Christians lived: “*They were of one heart and one mind...They held everything in common...*”
- At the same time, it shows the way in which they wanted to be perceived and appreciated by students, the type of educational relationship between teachers and disciples. The project of fraternity is inseparable from the school project which teaches according to the spirit of Jesus Christ. In building up a fraternal school, teachers make their first contribution by their persons, by their closeness to children and the young, and by the fraternal style of relationships among them.

In summary, we can describe the Lasallian project as a project of ministerial fraternity, a fraternity lived for the mission and shaped by the mission.

2.3 Consecration, the Root and the Guarantee of the Project

Like any type of life that is growing, the Lasallian project entered a crisis around 1690. It was a profound crisis, which reached the point of nearly bringing down the project, along with its founder. How was the crisis resolved? It was resolved by raising the project up to the category of consecration.

Before continuing, it would be appropriate to recover this concept of “consecration,” with all its density, so that it is not reduced to the idea of an individual religious relationship with God. The Lasallian concept of “consecration” is much richer, and it binds together three targets in the same covenant: God, the Brothers, and poor children and young people for whom the work is destined. Consecration to God acts as a guarantee of the other two covenants or commitments, it looks upon God as a witness and a supporter of our covenant with other associates and with the beneficiaries of the work. Understood in that way, the project of fraternity is substantially strengthened, and, although the project is prior to consecration, consecration constitutes the foundation and the guarantee of the project. The consecration/association of De La Salle with two Brothers in 1691, and with twelve Brothers in 1694, is the most decisive foundational event for the Lasallian Institute, but also, in the judgment of the 43rd General Chapter in 2000, “it is the source of Lasallian associations of lay persons and religious who wish to be part of the Lasallian Mission” (Circular 447, page 3).

If we look at now the two settings that make up this event, we will realize the relationship of foundation or guarantee which consecration/association contributes to the global Lasallian

project, the project which we are calling here a “ministerial fraternity.”

The first setting took place on November 21, 1691. Blain introduces it in this way:

“After serious reflection on the appropriate ways to shore up a sagging building at the very time it was being raised, the idea came to associate with him two Brothers he considered to be the right ones to support the newly-formed community and to commit themselves along with him, by an irrevocable link, to continue working for its consolidation” (Blain 1, 312).

The association of John Baptist de La Salle, Nicolas Vuyart, and Gabriel Drolin, made by a vow, clearly represents supporting the “newly-formed community,” which of course is much broader than the group of the three associates. To this “Community of the Christian Schools,” as John Baptist called it in the Memoir on the Habit, written two years earlier,

he will now give it, in the formula used for the consecration of the three, the more formal term of “Society,” “Society of the Christian Schools.” The relationship of their association (of the three of them) with the Society is expressed in this way:

– *“We consecrate ourselves entirely to you, to procure with all our means and with all our effort, our intent to establish the Society of the Christian Schools...”*

“And, for this purpose I, John Baptist de La Salle, and I, Nicolas Vuyart, and I, Gabriel Drolin, from this moment and forever until our last breath or until the complete extinction of said Society, make this vow of association and union to procure and to maintain said establishment, without being able to wash our hands of this establishment, not even if we are the only ones who remain in the Society...”

The second setting took place three years later, on June 6, 1694, Trinity Sunday. Another ten Brothers joined the three previous protagonists. We could say that this setting was an open one, while plans were being made as to the future. This setting seemed to be offering an invitation to enter into the setting in order to continue it. In the previous setting, we saw a “closed

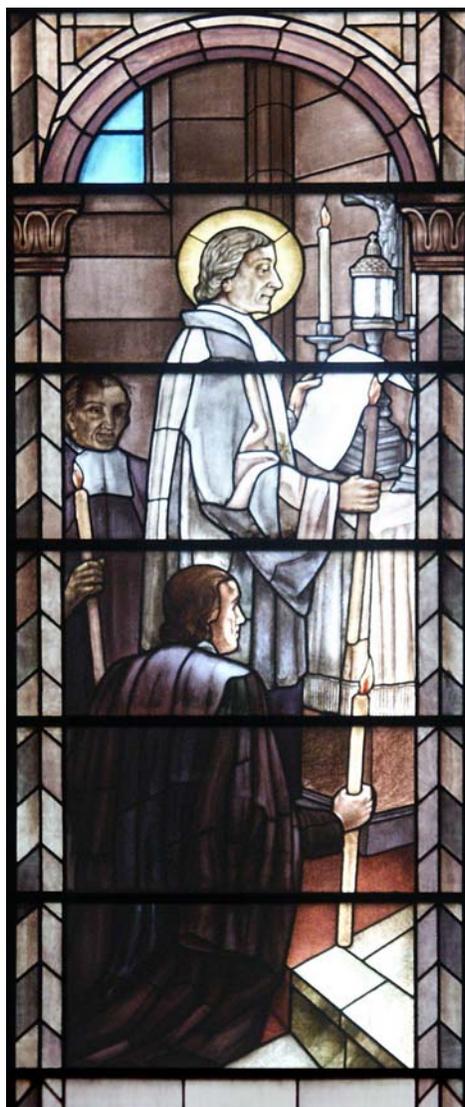


Photo: JAW

knot” composed of three persons, mutually supportive in sustaining something larger that was threatening collapse. Now, in contrast, we are presented with a group of persons who desire to continue growing – the group is already there, all they have to do is to join together to support the project. Each one makes his vow of consecration/association in the first person and names the rest of the members of this initial or “foundational” nucleus:

“I.....promise to unite myself and to remain in the Society with the Brothers.....”

All those who will come later for consecration/association, will not name the members of the foundational nucleus or the current members, but they will refer only to the group:

“...the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are associated together to conduct gratuitous schools...”

In the formula of consecration/association the equivalence between the group of associates and the Society which they support is not stated, but we can say that the difference has remained vague, so that, as has occurred over time, those who make the vow of association are absorbed into the Society of the Christian Schools, along with others who also make up the Society without having consecrated/associated themselves by vow.

And what does the sign of those who consecrate themselves contribute to the common project? Each one, as he consecrates himself, is stating that the project is God's work:

- He consecrates himself TO God to procure his glory in this project, because he trusts that He will continue to be present in the work and is interested in it;
- He consecrates himself WITH his Brothers, associating himself with them, feeling himself to be in solidarity with them to carry out the work;
- He consecrates himself FOR this mission, feeling himself responsible for the beneficiaries of the project, abandoned children and young people. Therefore, he subordinates his own self-realization to fulfilling the project of the Society.

The immediate result of Lasallian consecration is the strengthening of the project of ministerial fraternity: on the one hand, in referring explicitly to God, as His work, each associate lives with the awareness and the responsibility of being an instrument in God's work, independent of the role he fulfills and the specific place in which he finds himself. On the other hand, the project can count on the full availability of each associate to build up the community and to fulfill its purpose, not only in the local place but also

universally. In a certain sense, consecration breaks apart the limitations of the community as regards space and time.

3. A dynamic of life

The vow of association has produced in the origin of the Lasallian project a dynamic of life which has designed the three dimensions proper to this covenant.

3.1 The Creative Force of the Mission

The result of the vow of association, in the inner recesses of the Lasallian ministerial fraternity, is not the formation of a passive group that gives stability to specific structures. On the contrary, the vow, as a prolific covenant, promotes in those who make it a creativity which has, as an ongoing motive, the attempt to respond, together and by association, to the educational needs of the poor who come to their schools.

It is the visible proof that the act of consecration was not directed towards the promotion of individual sanctification, but towards the promoting of God's work, in which those involved are recognized as instruments, and they are identified with this “Society” or fraternity which has as its objective the running of Christian Schools.

One of the fruits and, at the same time, a sign of the creative force of Lasallian association is the Conduct of Schools, the fruit of the dialogue between the Founder and the first Brothers: they shared their experience, they examined the needs of their students, the evaluated results, they took advantage of pedagogical advances of the time, and they attained a coherent pedagogy which John Baptist would later reflect in written form, the result of teamwork. This is how to transform the school and make it an effective instrument for God's work.

3.2 The Regenerative Force of Fraternity

The vow of association carries with it the regenerative ability which is proper to communion in fraternity, as the Founder himself experienced. John Baptist de La Salle needed his Brothers to remind him about God in his story, to make clear a present time which was then in great crisis. The letter of April 1, 1714, written by the principal Brothers from Paris and the surrounding areas, did just that.

John Baptist received that letter probably at the school in Grenoble or in the hills of Parmenie. It had been two long years already that he was away from Paris and had cut off all correspondence with the majority of the Brothers. He was going through a disconcerting period inwardly, and he

had the sense that his life had been going down the wrong path, and he was strongly tempted to abandon the Institute and to retire to some parish.

The letter that the Brothers wrote to him, dated Easter Sunday 1714, in a certain sense served to return his life to him: it refreshed his memory, because it made him aware of God's saving action in his life; it also served to renew the shaky bond between John Baptist's personal identity and the collective identity represented by this letter, the "association for mission," whose membership John Baptist recalled. The letter is a living and direct testimony of that association for mission.

"Our very dear Father,

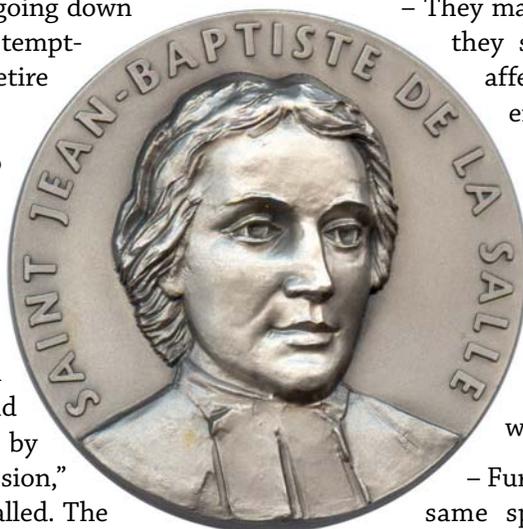
We, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools, concerned about the glory of God and the greater good of the Church and of our Society, recognize that it is of grave importance that you return to take charge of the care of this work of God which is also your work, given that it has pleased the Lord to have you found it and guide it for so long a time.

We are all convinced that God has given this work to you and has given you the necessary grace and the talent to govern this new Company, which is so useful for the Church; and it is a matter of justice to testify now that you have guided this enterprise always with great success and edification.

Therefore, we humbly beg you, and we order you in the name of the Body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, that you return immediately to take up the general governance of our Society."

The final objective of the correspondents was to ask and even to order the Founder to return to take up again the administration of the Institute. But they were not satisfied with that alone. It was not merely a matter of obedience. What they did was to invoke immediately the vow of association:

– First of all, they had to recover the history of salvation for this member of the Society, whose perspective had grown dark in John Baptist de La Salle; therefore, they reminded him how God had acted through his person, and how he had been an effective instrument to give this new "Company," which is so useful, to the Church.



– They made him feel their solidarity with him: they showed him their recognition, their affection, the bonds of mutual dependence in the life journey of the Society, which continue to be alive, and so they invite him to recover this. The community had an awareness of association: they made a community life journey in common with John Baptist, "guided" by him. And that covenantal life journey remained set in bonds of mutual dependence of which they now reminded John Baptist.

– Furthermore, they made him see that the same spirit was uniting them, the same charism; they said this as they used the same expressions with which the Founder had communicated that spirit: "concerned about the glory of God..."

This is the regenerative force which the vow of association brings to this ministerial fraternity, capable of giving new life to its members.

3.3 The Integrating Force of Consecration

Consecration is the deepest root of Lasallian association, it is its life source. But it is not a matter of acts or elements that add up (the sum of the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts), but it has to do with dimensions of the same act or reality (which is always the same, even though it is viewed from the perspective of one dimension or another), in such a way that we can state with equal exactness and interchangeability: the Brothers are associated with one another in their consecration to God and the Brothers consecrate themselves to God, associated together. As always, the idea of the Brothers "associating" is for the purpose of "together conducting schools."

Consecration to God is the dimension of Lasallian association which reveals to the players in the project the deepest meaning of the project itself, the definitive purpose of his life commitment, the "why" of the existence of this ministerial fraternity: it is God who has associated them together; it is God who has called them to work together and by association in his work; they are the mediators of God's love, the mediators of his plan of salvation for "the children of artisans and the poor."

– **The interpretation of the mission starting out from consecration**

It was from this perspective of consecration or belonging to God, and not simply from the perspective of a religious vow, that John Baptist de La Salle interpreted the mission in which he and his Brothers were collaborating and in this way discovered the meaning and the importance of his ministry, and he converted this interpretation into a theological story that developed into the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, not only for the Brothers but for “all those devoted to the education of youth” (according to the title of the first printed edition). What he and his Brothers were discovering and were able to live intensely from their overall project of ministerial fraternity, John Baptist understood that



other persons engaged in the same mission also would be able to live at different levels of intensity and, therefore, the story was offered to the lay teachers that were being trained in the “Seminaries for rural teachers” which he himself founded in Reims and in Paris. Later on, the Brothers extended the offer to the public in the first edition of the Meditations (around 1730).

At the beginning of the story the Founder offers us a key to understanding it: it is the sign of light which comes from God and reaches our hearts, but it does not remain hidden there, since it must continue on until it reaches our final beneficiaries, that is, the children and the young to whom the Lord sends us. In this way, we find ourselves as mediators of the light:

“This is what God does by diffusing the fragrance of his teaching throughout the whole world by human ministers. Just as he commanded light to shine out of darkness, so he himself kindles a light in the hearts of those destined to announce his word to children, so that they may be able to enlighten those children by unveiling for them the glory of God” (Meditation 193.1).

The story reaches its greatest intensity in Meditation 201. There De La Salle discloses for us the profound sense of our consecration, the source of the association that is gathering us. It is an experience of communion and participation in the very life of the Trinity, in its saving role, specifically

in the Christian education of children.

Throughout the Meditation, De La Salle shows us the three Persons carrying out the mission of salvation, each in his own way, and each one associating in the same dynamism as the Church and her ministers (us). It is the portrait of Communion for the Mission in its most original sources: the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and the Church. At the sight of these sources, De La Salle invites us to share and to enter “zealously” into this covenant; we share God's Work and work in the Lord's vineyard; we share the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us to build up the Church; we share the zeal of Jesus Christ for his

Church, and that of the Church for her faithful; we share the zeal of God for the salvation of souls and that of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, for his sheep...

- The interpretation of fraternity starting out from consecration

With this same perspective on consecration, De La Salle views fraternity, the life project that he and his Brothers are building up in service of the educational mission. The presence of Jesus in the midst of the community is the root of our fraternity. But here we are not talking about a passive or devotional reference, but about a true leading role; this is his view in a wonderful page from the Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer (2, 24-38), which we can summarize as follows:

Jesus Christ is in the midst of the community, building it up and leading it towards its aim, which is none other than the educational mission. At the same time that he fosters cohesion among the members of the community, he leads each one to attain his own identity, according to the “spirit of his state.”

All community dynamics rest upon the great Gift given by Jesus Christ, his Holy Spirit:

“He is in the midst of them in order to give them His Holy Spirit and to direct them by Him in all of their actions and

in all of their conduct.” (EM 2, 26)

With the person of the Spirit the characteristic spirit of this community is associated, that is to say, the charism by which this community has a specific identity in the Church for the development of the mission which has been entrusted to it. This charism grows within the community at the same time as the life of faith of its members and their mutual union, rooted in the Word of God.

Being a community of faith gathered together by and for the mission, the internal life of the community as well as its outreach to the educational mission, ought to have as a central reference point Jesus Christ himself:

“It is in this way that the Brothers perform their exercises and the actions in keeping with their state, with more or less perfection in proportion to their greater or lesser contact, conformity, and union with Jesus Christ” (EM 2, 32).

4. The colors of the rainbow today

4.1 Participating in the project: a road with many options

At the other end of the rainbow, that of our present time, the dynamic that we saw in the origins is still active. God continues enlightening the hearts of those He has chosen to proclaim His Word to children, and this light which associates us for the educational mission produces a rainbow of many different colors. We are today a group of Lasallian educators who are a sign of God's saving presence in the world. This is the same covenant represented in the Biblical rainbow and recreated today by this gift of the Spirit which is the Lasallian charism.

The charism is not given to us today in order that we integrate ourselves in a structure or an organization, but so that we might enter into a process of communion for the mission. Structures, organizations, institutions emerge in this process to make it effective and to give it continuity. To each is given the charism as the Spirit wills, along with other gifts and also insofar as each one is willing to accept them. In this way, various Lasallian vocations emerge. Each one, without comparing one to another, should be aware of one's own gifts and live them in complementarity with all who share the same mission, and in service of the group and of the common purpose.

This explains why, within the project and the Lasallian

Family, there is such a variety of personal situations among the corresponding groups. Some have just discovered the process and have barely entered into it: they will need time and also mentorship so that they can advance and get into it from the perspective of their own originality. Others have already been part of the group, they have chosen their own options based on their personal gifts and from their own understanding of and response to God's call. Each option is valid provided that it is integrated into the overall group and that it is open to the complementarity of other options.

Among those who in fact share the Lasallian Mission, “there are Partners who have a long record of collaborating in the Lasallian Mission, and who feel a call to deepen the charism, spirituality and Lasallian communion in which they wish to participate” (43rd General Chapter, Circular 447, page 4). Among those who are already living the experience of association, some feel called to formalize their commitment to association with the Brothers and with other Lasallian associates.

Each Lasallian, person or group, can live deeply the Lasallian charism and the project promoted by it, without the need to associate oneself formally. Those who do this formally, whether they are a Brother, Sister, lay person, or priest, offer themselves as a guarantor so that the Lasallian charism can be recognized, transmitted, and continued. Their offering does not separate them from the rest; it simply makes them signs among the rest of the Lasallians. We can find an example in those twelve Brothers who in 1694 made a formal act of association along with John Baptist de La Salle. They did not separate themselves from the other Brothers who at that time had not made a formal commitment, nor did they form a separate group. But their act of commitment served as a sign for the entire group that made up the “Society of the Christian Schools.” It is important that we continue to see formal commitments of association as a gift from God for the entire Lasallian Family.

4.2 Generating the Lasallian Rainbow

Let us speak now about the colors of our rainbow or about the forces that are acting within our Lasallian project, according to the comparison that is preferred. In the testimony and experiences presented in this Bulletin, we can easily identify those “colors” that make up the Lasallian rainbow. The “colors” vary in intensity. We did not want to limit ourselves here to present completed experiences or very advanced ones involving Lasallian association. We preferred to highlight the processes, the strong tendencies, to see how our Lasallian rainbow today is moving along

and how it is made up.

We can thus show the colors or strong tendencies that the Lasallian charism is fostering and intensifying:

- b** A way of living in solidarity and in fraternity. It is a community dynamic that drives the development of educational communities, inspires Christian communities with the Lasallian charism, and generates new communities that gather together Brothers and lay persons, in a new framework of Church communion, in service of the Lasallian mission.
- b** A global view of education, one beyond that of the specific forms in which they grow, which looks at the integral development of the person and the creation of a world that is in solidarity, with special concern for justice education.
- b** Community monitoring of the calls of the poor and, based on them, of children and young people. The option for the poor is a concern for all Lasallian associates, even though this concern may be evident in several ways depending upon the different states of life. It is a dynamic which brings about the assessment of all Lasallian works so that they might be effective in their service of the poor, and all Lasallian associates are involved in this evaluation.
- b** Participation in solidarity with the responsibility for the mission. Throughout the Lasallian world there is underway a renewal in structures of leadership and new ones are being created in which responsibility for the mission is shared between Brothers and other associates: Mission Councils, District, Regional, and International Assemblies...
- b** Availability to serve in the Lasallian mission wherever we are required, based on one's own possibilities and life options. This availability, which in other times seemed to be reserved for the Brothers, is today more and more shared by lay Lasallians, especially by associates. One proof of this is the growing number of young volunteers who offer one year or more of their life to work gratuitously in works devoted especially to the poor; also there are adult educators who offer their services to the Brother Visitor to be sent where they might be needed most within the District, sometimes even moving to a new location with their own families.
- b** The acceptance of John Baptist de La Salle as a teacher of life, and not just as a symbol that unites us or as an object of devotion. Brothers and other associates feel



united
about the Founder
in order to learn from his
Gospel life journey and to be inspired by his spirituality from his writings. In this training, which is shared more and more, we discover that we are collaborators with God in his work of salvation, and we recognize the particular gifts of one another in order to serve the mission together.

- b** Participation in a universal Lasallian culture, which is not limited to certain common symbols, but which plays out especially in many expressions of spirituality and pedagogy. Above all, it facilitates identification with the same values and attitudes with a view to the development of the mission and the renewal of society. The General Chapter of 2000, in Recommendation 9, proposed that each Lasallian adopt the following guiding principles, which already are part of a universal Lasallian culture: faith sharing, service of the poor through education, community building.

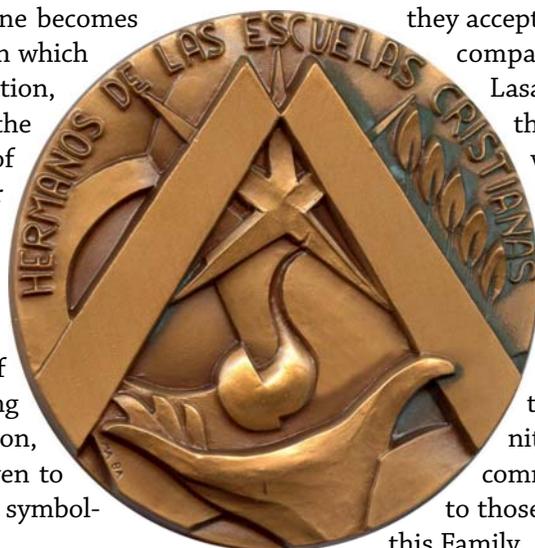
4.3 The Brothers: the Heart, Memory, and Guarantee

What is the Brothers' role in this new stage of the Lasallian project, with such a variety of identities that feel united in the same charism?

This is a question to be answered within a tension that is generated between these two poles:

- The first pole is the conscious affirmation of this experience: the Brothers overall and each community in particular, continue representing in a special way the Lasallian project begun by the Founder, since it is they who incarnate it in the form that is closest to that which John Baptist de La Salle set in motion.

- The second pole is generated as one becomes aware of the new Church reality in which the Brother ought to live his vocation, the new bonds of communion, the new way of sharing the mission of the Church, the living together with so many different identities that participate in the Lasallian charism. It is not easy to move from the role of being the protagonist in the mission to that of being another companion among many others who share the mission, Brothers and non-Brothers, or even to have to be satisfied with a merely symbolic role in the overall mission...



they accept being mediators of that light for the companions with whom they share the Lasallian mission today and they help them to discover the meaning and the value of their educational work. They are the heart especially because, just as the heart sends blood to all the body's cells and gives them life, so too when they take on the responsibility of communicating to the entire Lasallian Family the experience of their fraternity, and within that fraternity they promote the spirituality of communion, like real blood that gives life to those who are associated together to form this Family.

In searching for an answer to the question that was asked, the Brothers have had, first of all, to eliminate from their vocabulary the term “exclusive” – at least when it refers to living out the Lasallian charism in relation to the rest of the members of the Lasallian Family.

On the other hand, the Brothers have had to become more aware of the term “significant” in order to understand themselves better and to know what is expected of them within this family. That is to say, the Brothers have nothing in their identity that could be described as “exclusive.” But in a “significant” way they make visible certain basic characteristics of the Lasallian charism; in community they are a prophetic sign for the entire Lasallian Family, knowing at the same time that even that function is not reserved exclusively for them.

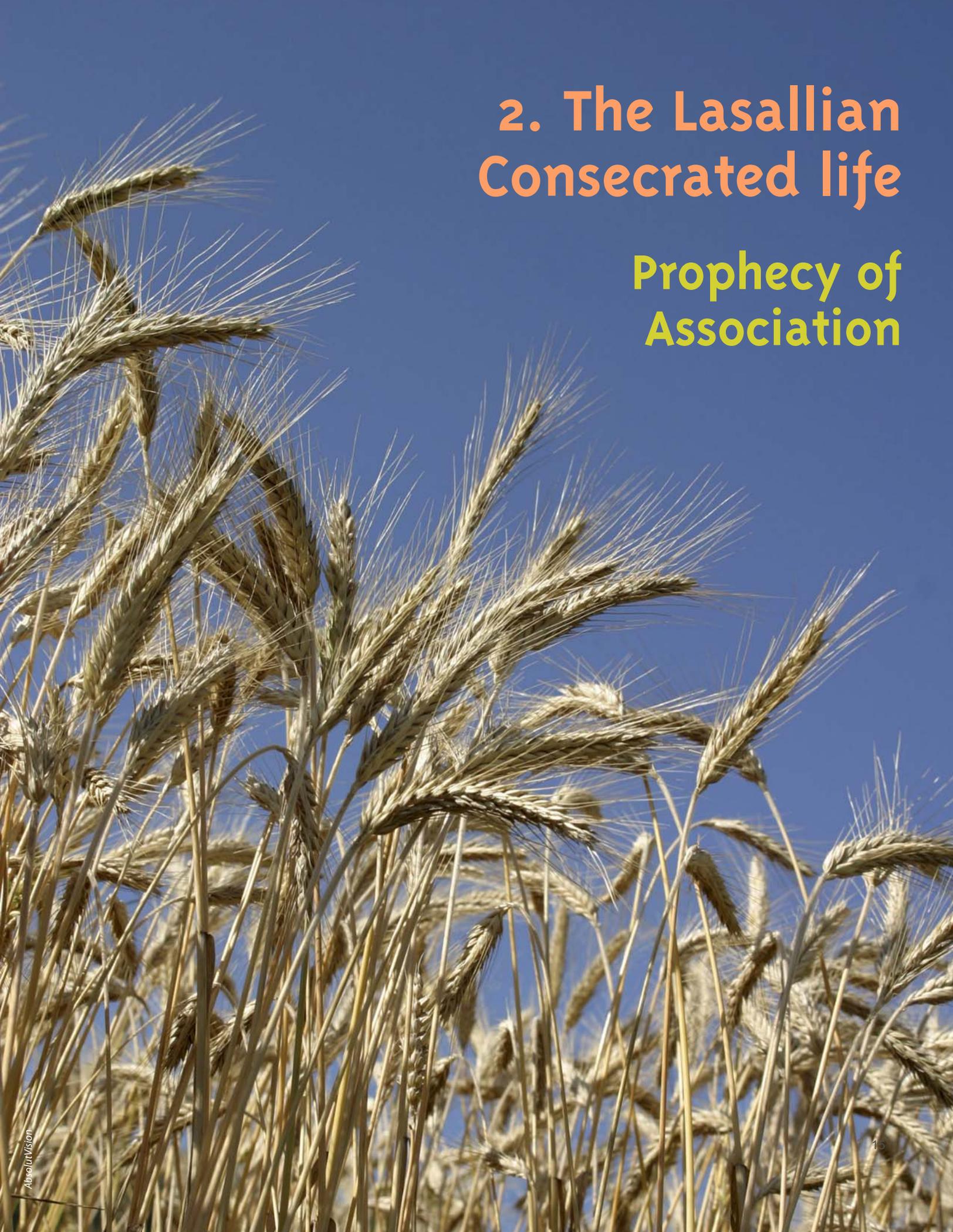
Having made this double clarification, let us move on towards the answer: the specific contribution that the Lasallian Family needs today from the Brothers is well represented in those three images that recent General Chapters have used to refer to them: the heart, the memory and the guarantee of the Lasallian charism. Three functions which they should take on in a significant way, without it belonging to them exclusively, since other members of the Lasallian Family can also adopt them under different forms.

- The heart of the charism within the Lasallian Family. They are the heart when they feel and they are moved by the cry of the poor, and when they make an effort to come to their aid with a clear preference, and when they communicate this sensitivity and this urgency to other Lasallians. They are the heart when, enlightened by the light which God has placed in their hearts (MTR 193.1),

- The memory of the Lasallian charism. “Memory,” not in an archeological sense, but in a liturgical one. That is to say, not as a memory of the past, but as a type of updating, bringing to the present the charismatic experiences which the Founder and the first Brothers lived in very different circumstances. The Brothers must be the “living memory” that establishes the connection between our foundational roots and the current situation of Lasallian association in the Church in today's world. It is this living memory that re-founds the Lasallian project and gives it new vitality.

- The guarantee of the charism in the Lasallian Project and the Lasallian Family. The Brothers make association the central axis of their identity and they live it as a form of consecration. They associate themselves in their consecration, they are consecrated in their association. This vital and global commitment converts them, as a community, into the guarantee of the Lasallian charism. A guarantee which, by being human, is always relative; but because it is supported by God it has the strength of his promise, the same promise that he gave to Moses when he said: “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12). The life and the commitment of the Brothers is a sign that attracts many other persons also to reinforce with their lives and their commitment the guarantee that the Lasallian Family and its project of ministerial fraternity for the Christian education of the poor can continue as the work of the Spirit of God.

Br. Antonio Botana
Secretary for Associates

A low-angle photograph of a field of golden wheat stalks reaching towards a clear, bright blue sky. The wheat is in full bloom, with long, thin awns extending from the heads. The lighting is bright, creating a warm, golden glow on the stalks.

2. The Lasallian Consecrated life

Prophecy of Association

2.1 Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: Re-foundation in association

Interview with Br. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, Superior General

By Br. Lorenzo González Kipper



1. The Institute for some years now has been going through a new process in association. Great attention is being paid to the signs of the times in light of the Founder. Brother Superior, how do you see these changes, particularly as regards the Lasallian reality of association?

I see the process that the 43rd General Chapter promoted in the Institute with a lot of hope, since it means a true relaunching of our charism. It is a new perspective which calls for us to change. The theme from the last General Chapter has been the source of inspiration for new policies within the Institute and it is helping us to discern better our own identity. It is the theme which I have chosen in my pastoral letters, because I am convinced that the concept and the living out of association was fundamental in the original thinking of our Founder.

2. Brother Superior, how has this process of association been lived, because if we compare the life of the Institute during the first decades of the last century with the Institute we know today, it is clear that there are vast differences?

In recent years, the Institute has really been the promoter of association. If we look at history, we realize that from the very first days of the Institute until the middle of the twentieth century we Brothers have lived association for mission with very little help from lay people. The model of association that we lived was the model of the Brothers' School in which lay persons helped the Brothers in their educational efforts.

In 1976 the 40th General Chapter opened the door to a new form of participation for lay persons involved in the Lasallian mission with the expression “degrees of belonging to the Institute.” At that time the Institute gladly received the first members of the Signum Fidei Fraternity, who made a public commitment in the presence of the capitulants. A few years later, the Institute promoted the concept of Lasallian volunteers. The Chapter of 1986 introduced the idea of shared mission in the Rule. At the Chapter of 1993 the presence of lay consultants allowed for the discovery of new perspectives. More recently, the 43rd General Chapter encouraged the idea of the international communion of Brothers, Associates, and Partners, who carry out the mission of educational service for the poor and, based on them, for young people in general.

Therefore, we can say that in these recent decades the Institute has appreciated, more and more, the different colors of the rainbow of Lasallian associa-

tion in terms of persons: Brothers, Sisters, Priests, Catechists, members of Signum Fidei, Volunteers, committed lay persons, Christian communities, united together for the same mission, inspired by the Lasallian charism as well as by the traits which we manifest in our common living of the Lasallian charism.

3. You have emphasized the importance of General Chapters as regards Lasallian Association. New Regional and District initiatives have certainly turned Chapter directives into reality. What structures, from your point of view, have most brought about the strengthening of the associative process in Regions and in Districts?

Regional and District projects are explicit and rich in propositions that have to do with association. I will limit myself to highlighting three structures that currently are promoting in a special way the living out of association among Lasallians.

First of all, there are the centers for formation which in many Districts offer numerous programs for Lasallians in general (Brothers and non-Brothers). The content and the length of the programs are varied, but their objective is always the formation of Lasallians in association for mission. The diverse identities are recognized, respected, and strengthened around the same charism.

Secondly, it is important to mention the Mission Councils, the Forums, and the Assemblies in which representatives from the different Lasallian groups participate, receive mutual enrichment, and create complementary projects for the educational service of children and young people, in the Lasallian style.

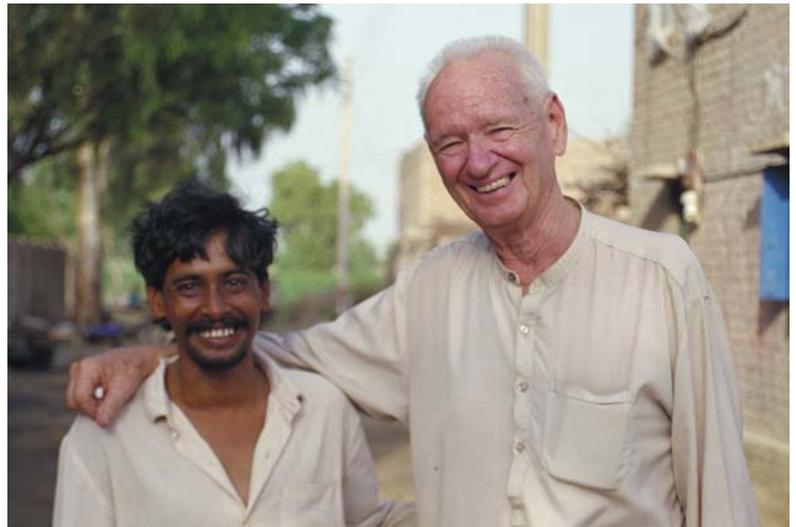
Another structure which acts as a driving force for association, and which is more varied and flexible, concerns the various forms of personal accompaniment of those Lasallians who desire to make a greater commitment. Districts and communities offer various means to ensure this accompaniment. Personal discernment, the life of faith, community experience, and educational commitment are special concerns in this regard.

4. Besides those three structures, are there other factors that are currently bringing about the process of association?

I will begin by highlighting three which, in recent years, have also influenced a more explicit living

out of a spirituality of mutual collaboration in order to open the potential of our charism to others: the ecclesiology of communion, the rediscovery of the role of the laity within the Church, and the new awareness of the potential of the Lasallian charism. All of us, Brothers and non-Brothers, are called to drink from the same well, to live the same charism from our own specific vocation. The charism is a gift of the Spirit to the Church which precedes and revitalizes all of us. One of the consequences of this has been the fact that a great number of lay persons have taken on the responsibility, not just of human development, but of the explicit proclamation of the Gospel.

One fundamental aspect about Lasallian ministry is that the school has been the privileged place for inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue, and this



has brought about the opening of association to persons of different religions. The heartfelt responsibility taken up by lay people as regards awakening interest in the vocation of Brothers and Sisters, as well as other ways of living the Lasallian charism, has allowed all of us to better perceive our sense of living out association.

5. It sometimes happens that when association is spoken about, the aspects of union and unity, the same mission, the same charism, are emphasized. In what sense does the idea itself of the reality of association include and appreciate differences?

Every religious family and every community needs to integrate union and differentiation, personal aspiration and group spirit, personal needs and the common good, the personal annual program and the community annual program.

Here we are talking about healthy and necessary tensions for the good of the person and of the group. The individual does not find fulfillment without the community and personal maturity does not end with the individual but in being for others, in the joyous gift of oneself, in love, and in service.

To improve our community life, rather than modifying its structures, what is needed is to strengthen and enrich its internal relationships, recognizing and appreciating differences.

Today we live in a multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic context. My visits, especially to the PARC Region, have made me appreciate even more our educational centers, where different cultures and religions meet together in mutual respect, tolerance, and fraternity. I was very happy to see that the Brothers and lay persons are building friendly relationships, developing fraternity, and are in solidarity with educational service, while all the while transcending different religious options. The differences between Regions, between Districts, between different styles of

works in which we participate, are great. Among us there are young Districts, Districts that are middle-aged, and Districts that are ageing. Within the Lasallian Family there are Brothers, Sisters, Priests, Communities of lay persons, Volunteers...

The “together and by association” of our origins continues to be for all of us a call to listen and to respect, because we are called to be signs of dialogue and communion, able to transform diversity into harmony. The global world in which we live, open to cultural interchange and interreligious dialogue, is an invitation to broaden our horizons and to respectfully examine differences which complement and enrich us.

6. You have pointed out, Brother Superior, that the Institute of the Brothers has played, especially during recent decades, a fundamental role in the promotion and living out of Lasallian association, but lay persons have also begun to participate more and more actively. Do you think that in the not too distant future, other Lasallian groups might have more active roles and that it would be up to the Institute to play a lesser role as protagonist within the Lasallian Family? In that case, what might be some of the challenges for the Institute?

To the extent that the living out of association develops, the Institute of the Brothers will have to “fit in” in a new way within the overall group of Lasallians. This would assume a certain kind of “demise” of some types of relationships that we have had: an end to wanting to control everything, to feeling ourselves superior, to assuming that others depend on us. It would also be an experience of a new life that allows us to open ourselves to others, to listen to them, and to be enriched by their contributions. We can envisage as a challenge for the future setting up a Council made up of representatives from associated groups.

The new perspective in relationships between associates, far from threatening identities, will bring about the awareness of the complementary richness which the particular identities themselves contribute. The term “family” may help in understanding the idea of the diversity of roles and responsibilities around one and the same charism. It will be very important that what is lived on the international level passes on to be lived in Districts and in local institutions.



An openness to our living association is the vital condition to ensure that the mission of service to children and the young will continue. Our common challenge continues to be the appreciation of the consecrated vocation and to encourage the lay vocation so that each lives the role that is his or hers in the Church. In that way, in spite of uncertainties, the Institute of the Brothers, the Institutes of Sisters and other consecrated persons, lay Lasallians, all of us must help one another to find the place that is ours within the overall group of Lasallian associates.

7. Thinking about the future of the Institute involves a new awareness of young people in formation. What has been done or what is being done to ensure that in houses of formation young people take on as part of their identity as consecrated persons this associative dimension for the Lasallian mission?

The International Formation Commission drew up a specific plan on association within the process of initial formation. Its guidelines are being integrated little by little in the formation plans of the Districts. This plan includes theoretical aspects of the reality of association, of the centrality of our vow of association, and the awareness of other Lasallian groups, as well as implications for community life and experiences of communion in mission.

Some things that have been put into practice include: joint experiences in formation, shared prayer, educational service of the poor, gatherings with other men and women Lasallians; testimonies presented to those in formation by men and women Lasallians; participation in District events, such

as Forums and Assemblies, in which those in formation live with, discuss, and commit themselves along with other Lasallian participants.

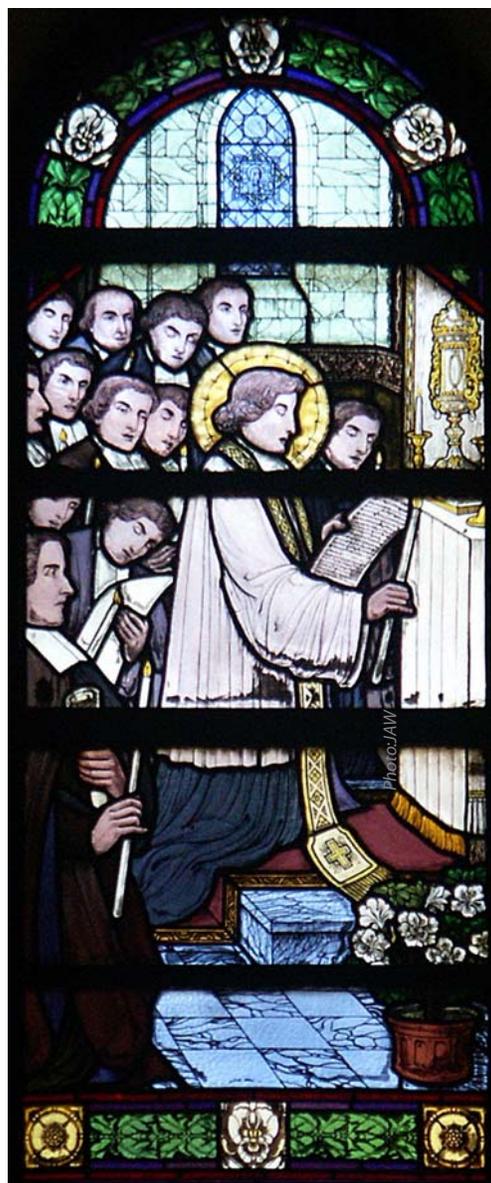
8. The Institute is going through new and different times. The term re-foundation is often heard. Do you believe that this new living of association might effectively be for the Institute itself a time for re-foundation?

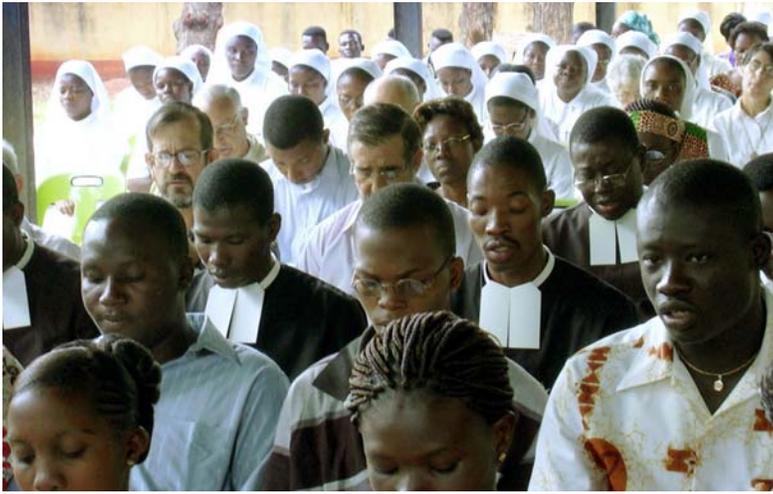
Association is our current form of ensuring the mission of the Institute in the world today, that is to say, of placing the means of salvation within the reach of the poor and, based on them, within the reach of children and young people. Thanks to the living out of association, thanks to the different groups that continue to spring up within the charism of De La Salle, the Lasallian mission is being carried out more profoundly and widely.

We are the promoters and the witnesses of a new form of life of the Institute, an Institute not closed in on itself, but one that is part of a great configuration of Institutes and of groups that revolve around the same mission, and drink from the same spiritual source, all living the charism which the Holy Spirit gave us through Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

9. What is the role, then, of the Brothers in this new phase of the Lasallian Family, conceived as a great configuration of Institutes, persons, and groups that live the same mission?

For the Brothers the theme of the last General Chapter, “Associated Together for the Educational Service of the Poor as the Lasallian Response to the Challenges of the 21st Century” was, as I pointed out before, the source of inspiration. Our





consecration to God is made manifest in our association with the Brothers and, along with them, with other persons committed to the Lasallian mission. As a community of Brothers we are, in the heart of the Lasallian Family, a sacrament of God's love, builders and signs of a fraternity in educational service of the poor. The associative element of our fourth vow makes us privileged witnesses of the unity between consecration, community, and mission.

10. What other message concerning association would you like to share with the Lasallian Family?

We are brothers and sisters and this is appropriate for our charism. In the Lasallian Family we do not have to exaggerate about Christian fraternity. It is up to us to live a fraternity that is “contagious,” that can be a sign for our world. We are called to live the mission of the Church in this world as brothers and sisters. As it was for the Founder, the future of our Lasallian Family depends upon the qual-

ity of our fraternal life: “Union in community is a precious gem; if we lose this, we lose everything” (Meditation 91.2).

Lasallian association does not allow us to limit ourselves to being in solidarity with persons for whom we render service in a specific educational center. We are called, as members of the Lasallian Family, to open ourselves in concentric circles, based on our own educational reality, to all persons who share the mission which the Church has entrusted to the sons and daughters of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

The charism of De La Salle grows in vitality to the extent that it is shared and lived by more persons. Today we are living a moment of new charismatic freshness, we are receiving new blood and we are doing a new reading of the Lasallian legacy. This is the grace and the opportunity for all of us to renew ourselves in our fraternal life and in our apostolic commitment.

As associates, we are aware that God our Father has placed in our hands the care of children and the young, to build together with them a world that makes visible the love of God for all humankind. To offer to young people and to the world hearts that are available to listen to them and to understand them, communities capable of welcoming them, a catechesis capable of giving meaning to their lives, and to bringing about their commitment in the building up of a fraternal and participatory world, this is our way of living as associated with the God of life.

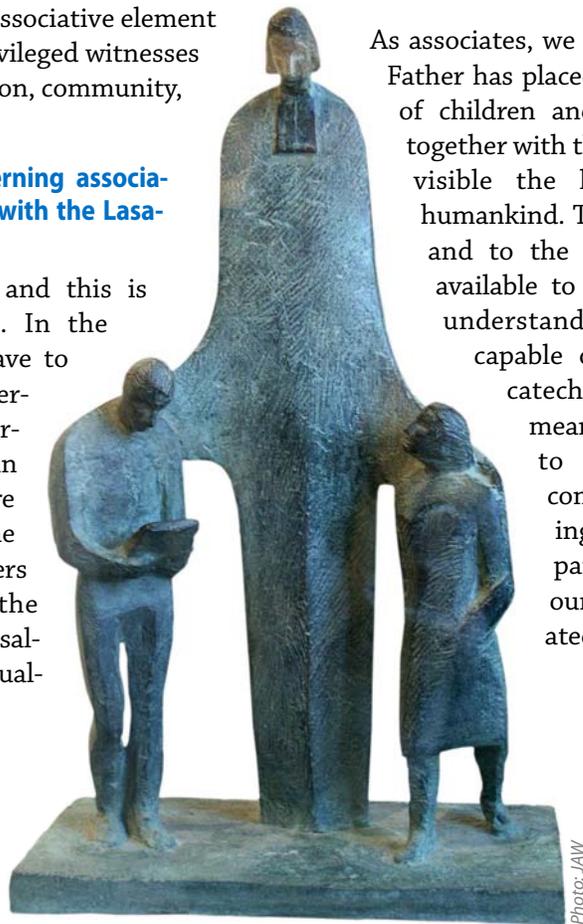


Photo: JAW

2.2 The Institute of the Guadalupeana De La Salle Sisters and their reunion with the Lasallian charism

Interview with Sister Ana Berta Arcos, Superior General

By Br. Antonio Botana

– In July 2004 your Institute held its 8th General Chapter. It was certainly the moment to launch the Institute into a new stage of its history. Can you briefly describe the present situation of the Institute, as the Chapter saw it?

We realised that the greatest core problem is insecurity with regard to our own identity, and the lack of clarity among the Sisters as regards their charism and mission, frequently confused with the tasks which we carry out, whether they be educational, catechetical or domestic. It is a crisis which has affected a significant number of Sisters and has influenced the departure of many others.

– And what are the roots of this problem?

We are the heirs of a history which has taken place in circumstances very different from those which we have to live today. Our Founder, Br. Juan Fromental wished us to be involved in education and catechesis, according to the Lasallian charism, although the social circumstances in which the Institute was born meant that the Sisters devoted themselves to a great extent to domestic service in religious houses of education or in seminaries. Within a few years of the foundation, Br. Juan was returned by his superiors to his native country, France, and forbidden to have any communication with the Sisters. From then on the Sisters were devoted, almost exclusively, to domestic service, with their personal formation reduced to a minimum. We were slow in picking up again the path which our Founder had wished for us. Our present Rule expresses clearly the unity of our mission, which is the human and Christian education of children and young people, especially the poor; but

The Institute of the Guadalupeana De La Salle Sisters was founded in Mexico in 1946 by Brother **Juan Fromental Cayroche**. It is a Religious Congregation of pontifical right, approved by Pope Paul VI. At present it is made up of 240 Sisters and is to be found in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, the United States, Italy, Madagascar and the Philippines.

Sister **Ana Berta Arcos**, Superior General of the Institute since July 2004, outlines for us the present situation of the Institute, searching for and reuniting with the Lasallian charism.



*Sister Ana Berta Arcos,
Superior General*

this clarity is not so evident in the lives and feelings of each one of the Sisters, because of the weight of the historical circumstances to which I have referred.

– How did the General Chapter deal with this situation? Did it set up some strategy for correcting it?

The Chapter approved various proposals which stressed especially the formation of the Sisters, both in regard to initial formation and in regard to continuing formation and was especially directed



at having them become aware of their identity as well as preparing them to carry out their mission in a fitting manner. But the proposals went further than that: for example, the Chapter asked that all the works and forms of apostolate which we had inherited from the past should be submitted to revision in order to find out if they corresponded effectively to our charism and, if this was not the case, to correct them or abandon them.

The Chapter expected the diverse functions and tasks of the Sisters to be integrated into the single mission of the Institute. We took on the responsibility of developing a project which would be, at the same time, faithful to our charism and creative, so as to respond to what the Church and the poor needed from us nowadays. It will be neither easy nor rapid, but we have accepted the challenge.

– Why do you identify yourselves as “Guadalupanas” and not simply as “De La Salle”? Do you not think that the name of the Institute takes away your universal character and identifies you too much with a specific people, with Mexico?

The name “Guadalupanas” relates us to Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is not just patron of Mexico but of all Latin America. Certainly it continues to indicate our historical roots, in the same way that the name “De La Salle” makes reference to another root which is also linked to 17th Century France. But the roots don’t have to be restrictive and they don’t take away our universality; they remind us of our heritage and they make us feel incarnated in this humanity to whom we have been sent.

But there is more, since the icon of Maria of Guadalupe is for us the spring or source where we best meet up with Lasallian spirituality: in it we contemplate the Mother who carried Jesus in her womb and wished to give birth to him in the midst of the people to whom he had been sent and towards whom his gaze was directed. Through our familiar icon we sense the mystery of our own identity of consecrated women, sent like Mary to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of children, as John Baptist De La Salle says. We feel ourselves to be mediators, like Mary, between Jesus and the poor among our people.

– The 43rd General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, held in 2000, officially recognised the Institute of the Guadalupana De La Salle Sisters as being associated with the Institute of the FSC for the Lasallian mission. Did this recognition mean anything for your Institute?

This recognition has been for us a further motive for refreshing our awareness of the common charism which animates us. We realised that the Lasallian family wishes to see in us the incarnation of the charism of De La Salle lived in its fullness as consecrated women. For this reason our General Chapter insisted strongly on reinforcing to the maximum our communion with the Institute of the Brothers and other Lasallian institutions.

2.3 Lasallian Sisters

The Congregation of **De La Salle Sisters** is the youngest branch on the Lasallian tree among the Religious Institutes. Since 2002 it has been an Institute of diocesan right, with some sixty Sisters. It was founded in 1966 by Br. Bernard Le Van Tam. Taking into account the scarcity of qualified women teachers for looking after the youngest children in school and responding to the wish of various young women who wished to consecrate themselves as Religious according to the charism of De La Salle, he started the foundation of this Congregation. Sister Martha, of the Congregation of Providence, acted as Mistress of Novices and was the first superior of the Community.

In June 1973, Br. Joseph Vankhoi, Auxiliary-Visitor of the Sub-District of Thailand, obtained permission from Br. Michael Jacques, Assistant, to ask for the services of the La Salle Sisters in his Sub-District. So, in November of that same year, five young Thai women went to Mai Thon in Saigon, to make their novitiate. In 1974, the first steps were taken in the Diocese of Saigon for the canonical recognition of the Congregation of the La Salle Sisters as an institute of diocesan right.

Shortly before the taking of the city (1975) by North Vietnamese troops, the young Thai Sisters returned to Bangkok and from then on the Sisters participated actively, along with Brothers and Lay Lasallians in running La Salle College in that city. Later on the Sisters created La Salle Nursery School where they look after about a hundred babies from one to two years old. In a neighbourhood close to La Salle College they run a kindergarten with about 650 children aged from 3 to 4, as well as well as a boarding-department for 60 children.

In 1975, a group of 23 La Salle Sisters, feeling threatened by the communist regime of Saigon, opted to leave the country and established a community in San José, California, USA.

In Vietnam, from May 1975 onwards, one of the main preoccupations of the Sisters was looking after young children who had been abandoned



because of the war. Between 1979 and 1988, the Sisters created, in spite of the difficulties, various catechesis centres. Later on the Sisters devoted themselves to diverse educational activities, mainly in favour of young children. The Central House of the Sisters, inaugurated in 1990, in Mai Thon, Ho Chi Minh City. The distinguishing mark of the response of the Sisters is that of the Lasallian mission, the same as that which characterises all Lasallians: the human and Christian education of children and young people, especially the poor. Their fount of life is also the same - the spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

At present they have seven communities in Vietnam, two in Thailand and five in California, USA.

2.4 The “Union of Catechists”



The **Union of Catechists of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate**, founded by Br. Teodoro Gerberolio, has always been an association of faithful in service of a mission. Its canonical recognition came about in 1914, just a few years after its founding. The mission for its members consists in catechetical activities both in schools and in parishes. Their activity is based on a spirituality which is inspired by the adoration of the crucified and risen Jesus.

Over time, some members of the association began to make vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which gave rise in 1948 to a Secular Institute. Since that time, they live in association both as members of the Secular Institute as well as those members who live their vocation as catechists as married members.

Nowadays members of the Union of Catechists are working on new ways to look at experiences in association. They are doing this by respecting their traditions and also by taking part in the reflection that is going on in the Church and in particular in the Lasallian world.

Currently, the Union of Catechists is comprised of 110 persons spread between Consecrated members and Associates, and they are present in Italy, Peru, Brazil, and Eritrea. In spite of their reduced size, the Union of Catechists has founded and administered wonderful works of a social nature, in which a great number of persons, especially the poor, have benefitted from their education. In Italy, they have some 100 teachers who work in 17 professional training centers. It is they who are moving forward in proposing the associative route, in order to participate in the mission and the spirituality of the Union.

It is very important for them to maintain ties with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools which saw them come into being and which recognized them as Associates during the General Chapter of 2000. An expression of this connection with the Brothers is the fact that some Brothers participate in some of the Catechists' works in Italy, Peru, and Eritrea.