

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Circular 458

In Memoriam  
**Brother John Johnston**



General Council  
Rome, Italy



**Circular 458**

September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008

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BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

**General Council**

Rome, Italy

Dear Brothers,

On October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Brother John Johnston died in his home city of Memphis, Tennessee, USA. During a period of 24 years, from 1976 to 2000, he served as Vicar General and then Superior General, leading the Institute through difficult, exciting and challenging times. He championed authenticity in our lives as Brothers; he encouraged the sharing of our Lasallian Mission by our Lasallian partners and provoked us into reflecting on global issues such the Rights of Children and Literacy.

According to custom in the Institute, the General Council issues a Circular letter at the death of a Superior General. Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, Superior General, invited Brother Gerard Rummery to author this Circular that we present to you in the name of the General Council. Brother Gerard had worked with Brother John for many years as Director of CIL, and as a General Councilor for his two terms as Superior. Probably no one else would have the perspective that Brother Gerard has of Brother John Johnston.

This circular, through Brother Gerard, paints a very human picture of our 25<sup>th</sup> Superior General, taking us through his growth in these positions of leadership, the development of his thinking on the Institute in the time he lived, and the difficulties and joys of his life as a Brother. This human portrait of Brother John is a bit of a departure from these kinds of memorial circulars but it is a firsthand account of one who was with him through these years of leadership.

We are grateful to Brother Gerard, for the research and time he has spent on this circular, and for his talent with words that gives us this picture of Brother John. We, therefore,

issue this Circular to the Institute in memory and tribute to Brother John Johnston.

Fraternally in St. La Salle,

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, Superior General

and the members of the General Council

Brother Thomas Johnson, Vicar General

Brother Jacques d'Huiteau

Brother Jorge Gallardo de Alba

Brother Alberto Gómez Barruso

Brother David Hawke

Brother Edgar Nicodem

Brother Claude Reinhardt

Brother Robert Schieler

Brother Gabriel Somé

## ***Section One***

### **1. Childhood and Schooling**

John Calvin Johnston was the first of four boys born to John Calvin Johnston and Margaret O'Reilly on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1933 in Memphis, Tennessee, USA. Memphis was a predominantly "Bible-Belt" Christian Afro-American city on the Mississippi River but the Christian Brothers had been present there since the 1860's through their high school and university. For John's parents, the times were difficult as the poverty that followed the Great Depression of 1929 was still widespread. Work was hard to find and the Johnston family, eventually comprising four sons - John, Edward, Joseph and Michael - struggled like so many others at that time to live and plan for a better future. But the sense of family was strong as John himself recalled years later when he mentioned how his father would keep contact with his wife by telephoning once or twice each day from his workplace.

John's early schooling was in his Catholic parish school. He soon showed himself to be a keen scholar who was at first attracted by the idea of being a priest. As he concluded the 8<sup>th</sup> grade his family was preparing to enroll John in the diocesan Catholic High school for his secondary education as they would not have been able to pay the tuition fees at the Christian Brothers' High School. To the great delight of the family, however, John won a scholarship to the Brothers' school.

Racial segregation was part of daily life in Memphis. The Civil Rights movement was still in the future and the minority position of Catholics in Memphis meant that it was possible to attend a parish school without ever meeting Afro-

American children. This is why one of John's particular recollections of his arrival at the Christian Brothers' High School was that of his first experience of being in class with some Afro-American students. When his parents questioned him during the evening family meal about his first day at the Brothers' school, John used a derogatory word to express his surprise on discovering that. On hearing his son use this derogatory word for black people, his father slapped him and forbade him ever to use that word again in the house. This incident, spoken about by John more than once in the Council community, seems to have been an important catalyst in his lifelong dedication and support for minorities and for the rights of children.

John's four years 1947-1951 in the Christian Brothers' High School reveal him as an outstanding student, a participant in many different activities and a natural leader. His qualities of leadership can be seen in the various mementos he kept of those years - scrap books, some 16 Honor and Scholarship medals, Honor Roll, his High School Diploma, his music award as Band President - culminating in his being chosen by his class as Valedictorian to give the Graduation Address. It was during these four years that he felt attracted to becoming a Brother and, some months after completing High School, he entered the novitiate of the Christian Brothers at Glencoe, Missouri in September 1951.

## **2. Entry and Early Formation in the Institute**

The District he entered was the Saint Louis District, one of the largest in the Institute, numbering close to 900 Brothers before its later division into three Districts. At the Robe taking, he received the name of Brother John Joseph, the same

name as a distinguished Brother catechist of the St Louis District whose writings and catechetical workshops were widely known and admired. Following his novitiate year, Brother John studied three years for his undergraduate degree at St Mary's College, Winona, Minnesota and in September 1955 he was assigned for his first teaching appointment to the Christian Brothers High School in St Joseph, Missouri. Three years later he taught for one year at De La Salle Institute in Chicago before being named to the Juniorate staff at Glencoe, Missouri. In successive years he became Director of Scholastics in Memphis and then in Winona, before being assigned before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday to follow the exercises of the International Second Novitiate in Rome. Brother John looked back on these nine months as one of the most important experiences of his life because it was through the presentations of the Director, the renowned Frère Clodwald, that he first saw the beginnings of the resolution of a personal dilemma that had plagued him from his own novitiate regarding religious life: "Were there two ends to religious life - personal sanctification and an apostolic purpose - or was there only one?"

In 1964, John was once again assigned to the classroom and so began the period he often referred to as "my happiest years as a teacher" when, for three years, he was Principal of Costa High School in Galesburg, Illinois. Of his role as both Principal and teacher, one of his colleagues remarks that "the faculty, parents and students admired him greatly" even to the extent of declaring that "if he wished, Brother John could be elected mayor of Galesburg!" But these three years were soon over. In 1968 he was named Director of the House of Studies at Saint Louis where he followed the Spirituality

for Formators programme led by Father John Futrell S.J. to prepare Formators for religious congregations. This year of theological study had a lasting effect on him as can be seen from the number of citations from Futrell found in John's subsequent writings over many years. It was as a Formator, that John followed the second session February-May 1969 of the International Lasallian Center (CIL), the replacement for the former Second Novitiate in Rome for Brothers engaged in formation. Upon his return to his District, John was named Director of Formation of the Saint Louis District, responsible for the Scholastics in his native Memphis.

Two years later the Saint Louis District was confronted by the unexpected death of the Brother Visitor, James Daniel Keller. It was a tribute to the high esteem in which Brother John was held throughout his District that he was elected and named Visitor of his District for three years and then re-elected in 1975. It was, therefore, as Visitor of his District that Brother John was called to the General Chapter of 1976. The Preparatory Commission of the 1976 Chapter, aware of this young dynamic Visitor of a large District, asked Brother John to address the Chapter delegates on the topic "The Challenge of St. John Baptist de La Salle to the Brothers Today." It was through this challenging presentation that Brother John became known to the Chapter delegates who, in their turn on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1976, elected him at 43 years of age as Vicar General of the Institute. Brother Pablo Basterrechea, former Vicar General 1966-1976, had just been elected Superior General.

### **3. Brother John's own 'formation' 1959 – 1971**

It is only in retrospect that we can begin to appreciate the

importance of the very different rich formation experiences to which Brother John had been exposed between 1959 and 1971 when he became Visitor of his District at 38 years of age. John's presence in the Second Novitiate in Rome 1963-1964 at barely 30 years of age would have been seen by many as "too young." It is also important to appreciate that this was the last session of the old-style Second Novitiate, dating largely in its content and style from its foundation by the renowned Frère Exupérien in the 1880's, but now increasingly out of touch with the completely different culture of the 1960's and the aggiornamento taking place in the ongoing Second Vatican Council.

As already noted, John brought a particular question to this year and found the beginnings of an answer in the presentations of Frère Clodwald. But it was also the impact made on him by meeting and being with Brothers in an international community for nine months, with French as the official language, that broadened his horizons. Through the changes taking place at that very time in Rome in the Second Vatican Council, there was an excitement about change that was readily accessible through news bulletins and books appearing in English. This was also the time when his own Institute was circulating a proposed new updating of the Brother's Rule as part of the preparation for the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. In doing this, the Institute was ahead of what would eventually become a direction from the Second Vatican Council through its document, *Perfectae Caritatis*.

Following this first international experience, Brother John lived the next three years 1964-1967 as Principal at Costa High School in Galesburg, Illinois, his first opportunity to be in charge of what was essentially a 'Brothers' school' as the

faculty, with only one exception, were members of the community. This was an opportunity to put into practice many of the things he saw as valuable and indeed fundamental to a school directed by the Christian Brothers. But it was also the period when many of the sweeping changes initiated by the Vatican Council and, even more particularly, through the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in Rome, had an unsettling effect in many communities. Traditional practices, such as the previously settled coutumier or time-table of prayers and other activities in the community, were contested from different points of view and there were many different forms of experimentation, recommended by the Chapter, but not always well understood by those initiating them. It is worth recalling the great difficulty many Brothers experienced in finding their community members in collar and tie instead of the Christian Brothers' habit or collar, or others advocating, and eventually implementing a kind of 'commune' with lay people. There were often in the same community, very diverse interpretations concerning such practices as the prayer of the community, some justifying their various apostolic activities as their prayer, others wishing to maintain the forms in which they had been formed.

It is most significant, and surely providential, that, at this time, John was directed to Saint Louis as Director of the House of Studies, along with the opportunity to spend a year with other religious men and women following the Spirituality for Formators course taught by Father John Futrell, S.J., for those who were to be the future formators of their congregations. The post-Vatican II changes had impacted on practically all active religious congregations so the presentations and discussions of the course reflected the major ques-

tions being faced by all religious communities. The Theology of Religious life, as taught at Saint Louis, laid down historical bases but also was open to the experiences of religious men and women grappling with their present post-Vatican II world. The year gave Brother John the opportunity to internalize the important experience of his own Second Novitiate as well as to offer him the opportunity to deepen the theological bases on which religious life had always been based.

This broad experience was soon put to the test with John's attendance at the second session of the newly-established Lasallian International Center (CIL) in Rome from February to May 1969, because this brought him into contact once again with formator Brothers from all over the world. The dynamic of the session, much contested by many of those who followed it, put the onus on the participants, in terms of their particular cultures and situation, to re-think and re-establish their formation programmes in the light of the momentous changes coming from the Second Vatican Council and the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. For John, this was a challenge to particularize the general tendencies of his own studies at Saint Louis, and apply them to the formation programmes for which he was responsible in his home District. There is no doubt that the following two years, when he was in charge of a large number of Scholastics, confronted him with very particular challenges but it also kept him in touch with a new generation of young Brothers.

It was in the 1967 Declaration of the Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today from the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter that Brother John was to find the best resolution of his long held question on the "two ends of religious life" so it is no surprise that it became one of the main concerns of his

address to the delegates at the 1976 General Chapter. It is noteworthy that there are 15 citations from the Declaration (as well as two direct references to Futrell) in this presentation. The Declaration was the most consistent theme of all his later writings, conferences and retreats, his vademecum for the rest of his life.

#### **4. The Address to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

John himself was later to recognize that this invitation to address the 1976 General Chapter was a major turning point in his life. For this reason, it is worth analyzing the emphases of the presentation he offered.

First, however, it is important to realize that in the decade 1966-1976, the Institute had lost many Brothers who, for various reasons, had given up their former vocation. Brother John's presentation to the Chapter followed the official reports and reflections from the twelve territorial Assistants elected by the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 1966. Brother Luke Salm, himself a delegate to the Chapter, gives this summary account of what the Chapter delegates would have heard:

*It will suffice to mention some of the principal themes that emerged in several reports. Almost all the reports referred to declining numbers; difficulties in understanding the principle of subsidiarity or preventing it from becoming an excuse for total autonomy; difficulties among the young Brothers, especially in relation to final vows; the reluctance of some Brothers to teach religion. Formation programs everywhere were reported to be undergoing transition and revision. Most of the regions that had experimented with new-style open communities reported a high level of failure. Some Brothers were having difficulty adapting to structural change in prayer, com-*

*munity life, and the separation of the community from the school. Despite great interest in the service of the poor, in many places it was seen as a threat to existing institutions. (Brother Luke Salm, A Religious Institute in Transition, pp. 181-182).*

Brother John's presentation sets its tone with the following words:

*I am deeply honored by this request, but awed by the responsibility entrusted to me... I want to acknowledge explicitly that I do not believe any individual Brother in the Institute could... tell this delegation what the challenge of De La Salle is to the Brothers today.... I see my role as that of a catalyst in our communal search... What I have attempted to do, within the framework of my limitations, and, in a prayerful spirit, is to penetrate the mind of the Founder. To "crawl into his skin and walk around in it" (recalling Atticus Finch in the novel To Kill a Mockingbird), in order to grapple with his experience of God's will and his response to that call. At the same time I have searched for the Founder's own understanding of the Brother's vocation.*

He then states unequivocally what he sees as the foundation of his presentation:

*The delegates of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter tried to bury once and for all any understanding of the Brother's vocation that suggested two separate ends... some kind of hybrid vocation, that of a monk-who-also-teaches, the monastic dimension corresponding to the primary end, the teaching dimension corresponding to the secondary end.... We know that the delegates forcefully repudiated this dichotomized view of the Brother's vocation and spirituality. We were told that the "purpose of the Institute is apostolic. For its members apostolic action is of the very nature of the religious life." (Declaration No. 25)*

Brother John offered eight particular ways of breaking down the overall challenge made to us by Saint John Baptist de La Salle. The first of these, and indeed the foundation for all that followed through seven particular emphases, was to *understand our vocation*:

*I insist... that the seven parts of the challenge are more important in terms of our lived experience, but they can be properly understood and lived only if the question of who we are and what God expects us to do (Fiddler on the Roof) is faced honestly. ... Experience indicates to us... that this teaching of the Declaration was not everywhere well understood. Many Brothers, equating 'apostolate' with activities relative to the apostolate, such as teaching and administering, seriously misinterpreted the message. Some, believing the Chapter delegates deemphasized 'religious life' understood as prayer, liturgy, and spiritual reading, were scandalized and angered. Others, interpreting the results in the same manner, were delighted and proceeded to justify their contention that formal prayer is not necessary or even desirable, that 'my work is my prayer'... I believe the Chapter message was distorted and misinterpreted because Brothers fail to differentiate between 'distinction' and 'separation'. These (three) areas (religious consecration, community and apostolate) are distinguishable, but not separable.*

Brother Luke Salm, who, as a Chapter delegate, listened to Brother John's presentation, offers this summary of what he heard:

*Brother John organized his presentation, intended as a catalyst in the common search for De La Salle's challenge, around eight statements that, as he said, sound simple but are not, as his development made clear. At the end of the talk, he summarized the eight challenges as follows.*

1. *Understand our vocation more profoundly – penetrate the meaning of being called by God: be signs, both personally and communally, of his saving presence;*
2. *Be religious men, have a religious stance to the world, be men who believe that “Jesus is Lord”, men of prayer, men of simplicity of life;*
3. *Be zealous men, impelled by the love of Christ, “willing to give our very life, so dear to us are the children entrusted to us.” (MTR 6);*
4. *Be religious educators, by our personal and communal witness, by our contribution to the formation of Christian communities, by formal religious instruction;*
5. *Be signs of the Lord’s presence to the poor, by identifying ourselves with their concerns, by working for social justice and peace, by educating them directly;*
6. *Be educators, realize that education is truly an apostolate;*
7. *Be Brothers – in De La Salle we have the same father, we are his sons, we have his life, we are brothers;*
8. *Be faithful, keep saying ‘yes’ in spite of everything.*

Brother Luke continues:

*Such a summary, rather abstract and essentially positive, does not do justice to the critical insights, the concrete realism, the forcefulness of the development, and the presentation. In particular, Brother John pointed out that Brothers fail to understand the definition of our vocation as stated in the Declaration, and do not always see the need to integrate the three elements of religious consecration, community and apostolate. Although these elements are distinguishable, they are not to be separated from one another. He wondered to what extent in our lived experience we are truly reli-*

*gious men, especially in the matter of a vital life of personal prayer. Likewise, he questioned whether the Brothers generally “have internalized the concern for the poor that is the very essence of our vocation.” His development of this theme was the most extended in the presentation, the most challenging, and the one that made the greatest impact on his audience. (Brother Luke Salm, An Institute in Transition, pp.191-192)*

It is noteworthy that there are some particular expressions in this presentation that become part of Brother John’s vocabulary and re-appear frequently in all his writings. One is the expression he acknowledges as derived from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, we need to know ‘Who we are and what God expects us to do.’ The other is his definition of zeal as an impassioned eagerness on behalf of persons or causes that often found its expression in Brother John launching into song with “To dream the impossible dream” from the *Man of La Mancha*.

In contrast to the often pessimistic Reports of the Brother Assistant Superiors General to the Chapter and hearing of the large number of Brothers who had left the Institute in the past ten years, it is not surprising that the Chapter delegates saw the author of this inspiring presentation as someone in whom they wished to place their trust as a member of the General Council.

## **5. Brother John Johnston, Vicar General 1976 – 1986**

“My years of apprenticeship”

In a letter of 31<sup>st</sup> May 1976 to the Brothers of his District, Brother John expresses his surprise at receiving a majority

vote in the first “straw vote” taken during the General Chapter and writes, “I am open to whatever the Lord asks of me but my feelings are terribly mixed.” He was duly elected as one of the six Councilors to form community with Brother Pablo Basterrechea and then, from their number, elected by the Chapter delegates as Vicar General.

Brother John was to look back on the next ten years, as he confided more than once to his tennis partner-opponent Brother Gerard Rummery, as “my years of apprenticeship.” Brothers John and Gerard had made the 1969 CIL session together and had met one another on a number of occasions after John became Visitor and Gerard served on the CIL staff during the 1973 session. They shared a common interest in playing tennis, so that when Gerard returned to the CIL staff towards the end of 1977, their friendship and their tennis matches were renewed. It was often after these matches that John would unburden himself a little as he coped with his new responsibilities as Vicar General. “Years of apprenticeship” seems to be an appropriate expression for Brother John’s ongoing experience when the following details are taken into consideration.

A major change initiated by the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter was the suppression of the territorial role played since the early days of the Institute by the Brother Assistants. The Book of Government, amended by the 1976 Chapter in Chapter 3, article 26, proposed the following role for Brother Superior and his Council:

*The Council should bring together around the Brother Superior a team as diversified as the Institute itself, composed of Brothers capable of forming a close union among themselves and acting in a collegial manner. They should be chosen for their complementarity,*

*their spirit of generosity in sharing their responsibilities and their experiences, their willingness to serve and a desire to collaborate with the Superior who holds the principal position of responsibility in the Institute.*

The implications of this change need to be considered. The Districts now had their autonomy and were to be guided by the Brother Visitor as their major authority. District Chapters were to be introduced and held regularly to provide the guidelines to formulate policy until the next District Chapter. In this sense, Districts were primarily responsible for their own vitality. The role of the General Councilors, gathered as a community with the Brother Superior, was to form community at the heart of the Institute to model what the Rule envisaged. Theoretically at least, the elected Councilors were to visit every part of the Institute in teams of two or three over the coming ten years. One visit would be with the Superior General and the other with the Vicar General. Councilors might have a liaison with a particular District but it was one of service and animation, not one of authority. The Institute was henceforth to be thought of in terms of 11 geographical Regions, some eventually naming designated Regionals whose task was one of animation and coordination, acting along with the relevant Visitors' Conference according to the role that each Conference had designated.

A particular aspect of this challenge for Brother John was the vagueness concerning the traditional role of the Brother Vicar: he was to replace the Brother Superior when he was absent and to take special charge of the Brothers' works in mission areas. In the Report given by Brother José Pablo to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter as Vicar General, he seems to have found it necessary to justify his absences from Rome by poin-

ting out that it was only through his personal visiting of some 64 of the 73 Districts of that period that he felt he could really fill his role as “first collaborator and counselor of the Brother Superior,” but he had managed to do this while being present for 70% of the years 1968-1975 and for 75% of the Council meetings. As regards his responsibility for the coordination of the Institute’s missionary policy, Brother Pablo was able to point to the development of SECOLI, a coordination entity, whereby those Districts that are able, can aid those most in need; in relation to his absences from Rome, to emphasize the importance of actually visiting the missionary areas of the Institute so as to have something more than a theoretical understanding. The questions posed to Brother Pablo, following his Report to the Chapter, had indicated some widespread dissatisfaction about this traditional role, with the implication that there was a new understanding to be fashioned. But this would take place, not by theory but through experience, and would require various modifications as time went on. If this was a challenge in itself, it is worth reflecting on four specific challenges that Brother John had to face up to immediately in his new position.

First, he was now based in Rome, where the official language of the Casa Generalizia for the celebration of the Eucharist and the daily prayers, was Italian. While John had what he once called a certain ‘residual’ French from the Second Novitiate and the beginnings of some competence in Spanish, because of his role as Visitor with the Saint Louis Brothers in Guatemala and Nicaragua, he would be now working in three languages other than English. The minutes of the regular meetings of the Council would be written in French but the documentation studied would come from any of the

above four languages. Becoming competent in all these languages was going to be a lengthy process but it had to begin at once. While John was a good musician and singer, it seems he was not naturally endowed in developing the intonation and accent of other languages, although he eventually made great progress in the grammar and correct syntax and usage.

Second, he was now changing his life from one full of movement and regular travel in the vast Saint Louis District (including his visits to Central America), from the regular meetings of the Visitors' Conference, to what seemed likely to be a much more 'static' life, working from his office in Rome. He would frequently be called on to represent Brother Pablo when he was absent and be expected to participate in discussions in languages other than English, to act as chairman in meetings of a quorum of the General Council when Brother Pablo was absent, and to speak spontaneously on occasions such a birthdays, funerals and other celebrations. He would also be asked to represent Brother Pablo in the meetings of the Union of Superiors General of Men (USG) and attend the SEDOS (Service of Documentation and Study) meetings on important topics.

Third, he would be invited to give retreats and presentations in different languages to various groups, but all of this would depend on his availability to leave Rome. If the work requested was to be in another language, he would first have to prepare his original text in English, have it translated through the secretarial pool in Rome, and deliver it as best he could in another language. Brother John eventually did all this so well and so fluently in later years in Spanish, French and Italian, that it is easy to forget just what this would have demanded of him when he began.

Fourth, although the Superior General and Council had their own meeting rooms and dining room, they followed the rhythm of the General Community as regards Eucharist and prayer. This ran the risk of the Council becoming much more a work group rather than a community and it is interesting that Brother John was one of the protagonists in the gradual evolution of the community life of the General Council. Here, for example, is part of a much longer letter written to Brother Ramon Grau, Director of the Central community, in November 1976, after John was only a few months resident in Rome:

*My particular concern is the relationship of the General Council to the other Brothers of the house. We have given priority to praying with the Brothers, rather than praying daily as a General Council community. But our contact with the other Brothers is almost completely limited to the chapel.... Frankly, I think there is something seriously wrong with this arrangement... The communal dimension of our common prayer life must transcend mere physical togetherness and common identity as Brothers. There must be a bond of unity based on some degree at least of interpersonal relationships...*

Brother John's concerns were eventually addressed by the General Council community. As there were likely to be frequent absences of the elected members of the community, it was eventually decided that the leaders of the four permanent general services in Rome – the Secretary General, Ecologue, Postulator and Procurator to the Holy See – would be added to the Council community so as to help provide a permanent quorum for the prayer of the Council community and for their celebration of Eucharist. This proved a satisfactory working solution, even though the fact that there were two 'levels' of membership - the Brothers holding the Gene-

ral posts were named by the Brother Superior in consultation with his Council - did occasionally present some difficulties.

Meanwhile, the members of the General Council had set themselves to work first of all with the post-Chapter Commission to authorize the official text of the Chapter resolutions. They were then to produce their reflections on the discussions and decisions of the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in a series of circulars, written over a number of years through different Counselors acting as the collator of discussions and written interventions. These circulars, besides offering the Chapter report on a specific topic, carried as well certain Dossiers, defined as follows:

*In order to sensitize the Brothers of the decisions, orientations, messages of the General Chapter;*

*In order to propose programs of renewal at the various levels: Brothers, communities, districts, regions, center;*

*In order to introduce and to apply to the life of each Brother and institution the decisions and guidelines of the Chapter;*

*And in order to evaluate these applications and their effects;*

*Be it resolved:*

*That the Center send documents, at various intervals, including questionnaires and study material, for use by the communities.*

This collection of General Chapter documents and study materials we call a *Dossier*.

The preparation of these Circulars – Nos. 403, 404, 406, 408, 410 and 412 – with the creative Dossiers of resources was the ongoing work of the Council until towards the end of

1980. Most of them were written by a principal writer or redactor whose task was to engage Brother Superior and his fellow Councilors in the work according to their availability. This was a very demanding work in which Brother John, as Vicar General, was heavily engaged because he was more permanently in Rome.

We can, nevertheless, gain some idea of Brother John's developing confidence in his new position by looking at selected parts of his correspondence after 1976 as he begins to become accustomed to the diversity of activities required by his greater international role.

April 1976 to the Saint Louis District: "The General Chapter should accept the Declaration as the authoritative statement relative to our identity and finality and as the basis for all the decisions of the Chapter."

July 1<sup>st</sup> 1976 to the Saint Louis District: The Chapter adopted a new form of Central Government designed

1. To eliminate 'regionalization' and promote unity;
2. To promote collegially the living unity of the Institute;
3. To promote closer collaboration between Districts and the Center, closer collaboration between districts and among regions and co-responsibility and accountability at every level.

December 10<sup>th</sup> 1976: As a reactor to a SEDOS presentation that called for a new approach for action on the part of religious men and women in the service of justice in the world, "Since I am a newcomer to Rome, I am still in the process of trying to deepen my own awareness of world problems and to break out of my provincialism..."

December 12<sup>th</sup> 1976: A handwritten text in Spanish in which Brother John is welcoming Cardinal Pironio to a meal celebrating, among other things, the Silver Jubilee of Sister Irena, a member of the Guadalupanas Sisters working in the Casa Generalizia.

January 17<sup>th</sup> 1977: A text in Italian setting out in detail the new structures of Government as decided by the General Chapter.

February 1977: An article written at the request of the Irish District, following the visit made to England and Northern Ireland with Brother Patrice, emphasizes the importance of the Declaration and stresses again that it is the District, not the Superior General, that has taken over the position of authority formerly held by the Assistant. Brother John's reiterated slogan on this point was that of Unity in Diversity, not Unity through Uniformity.

March 31<sup>st</sup> 1977: A comprehensive text, in English, French and Spanish, addressed to the Brothers of the Central Community on Some Fundamental Attitudes to Prayer.

April 6<sup>th</sup> 1977: A text addressed to the General Council on the status of certain legislation when the text of all the Chapter decisions had not yet been published. (It is noteworthy that the justification for the text is Brother John's difficulty in answering phone calls about this matter while Brother Pablo was absent).

Not dated: (Memo to General Council "Thought on study of Religious Consecration and Vows" during the preparation of the Circular, Our Consecrated Life.

"In association" is an image that I believe can help the Brothers immensely in their search for personal and corporate

identity. Consequently, I think the notion of “association for the sake of the mission” should become more and more a central focus in our religious consecration.

As the decade continues it is possible to see Brother John’s growing confidence and adaptation to his situation through such diverse activities as the following:

Because he cannot leave Rome, he sends a tape recording of some conferences for the District of Colombo; sends two similar recordings for the District of Australia; authors a detailed report following his visit with Brothers Vincent Rabemahafaly and Patrice to the United States; sends a memo to Brother Patrice for the document on Community; prepares some handwritten notes for an interview with Vatican Radio; writes documents in Italian, French, Spanish and English on Lasallian Promotion; answers requests for various articles for District reviews, all noteworthy for the abundant references to the Declaration; assembles various citations in English from different theologians on Images and Models in relation to canon law and with reference to the Report of the Vow Commission that was not accepted by the 1976 General Chapter; convokes and presides at a Prayer Symposium November 9<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> 1980 for the Tercentenary of the Institute; authors a number of articles from a foundation presentation given in Ireland on the Teaching Role of the Brothers in the Church Today; writes an inspiring presentation on the Lasallian Educational Ministry to be given to the first national Convocation of U.S. Brothers at St Mary’s Moraga in August 1984.

A major responsibility for Brother John was developed after Brother Pablo appointed him on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1976 as the

liaison person between the General Council and Bethlehem University, which had been founded in 1973 to provide further opportunities of higher education for Arab youth primarily from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This foundation, initiated by the then Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Pio Laghi, at the request of Pope Paul VI who maintained a keen interest in the project, invited the Brothers who had worked in education in the Middle East for over a century to offer their valuable Bethlehem property as a convenient campus site.

Brother John's personal correspondence with various authorities in relation to Bethlehem University is frequent and extensive, initially in what concerns the formulation of statutes and the close relationship with the Vatican Congregation for Oriental Churches but increasingly in direct contact with the Brothers directly connected with the daily running of the University. Bethlehem University was to become one of Brother John's major concerns for the next 24 years of his leadership so that he never missed the calendar dates for the Rome meetings with the various interest groups associated with the University.

Brother John had two particular crosses to carry in 1982. On February 13<sup>th</sup> in Huehuetango in Guatemala, Brother James Miller was shot and killed by soldiers under the control of the right-wing extremists in the country. Brother John, who had been James Miller's teacher at Glencoe in the Juniorate in 1959, felt this assassination very keenly and took personal responsibility for the facts becoming better known in USA and in the Institute generally. His second personal sorrow was his mother suffering a stroke and having to be cared for by his family. He found it extremely painful not to

be able to converse with her during his visits and he was always sensitive to the fact that he could not be directly associated with her care. This very personal sorrow he kept largely to himself but in his first Pastoral Letter as Superior General (January 1<sup>st</sup> 1987), he acknowledged the support he had received:

*“... I wish to thank the countless Brothers who, over the four years of my mother’s illness, as well as at the time of her death, have expressed their solidarity and their prayers. My father, brothers, and other loved ones have been deeply touched – as I have – by the loving concern support of so many Brothers around the world. I thank you sincerely.”*

Perhaps it was only those who knew Brother John prior to 1976 and who came as delegates to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter in 1986 who could in some way appreciate that he had indeed served such a thorough ‘apprenticeship’ that he would become the overwhelming choice of his Brothers as Superior General.

Brother John readily acknowledged on many occasions the Brothers of the Council who had been his mentors, or to retain the apprenticeship metaphor, his ‘masters’. Of Brother Pablo Basterrechea in particular he writes:

*... I want to reflect on the great gift of leadership that has been ours these past ten years. I am speaking of course of the leadership of Brother José Pablo and his General Council. Brother Pablo’s Christmas Letters, as well as the General Chapter report, enables any reader to perceive his vision, his goals, his objectives, his priorities.... He addressed consistently, clearly, and emphatically the question of our identity and mission in this rapidly evolving world. He challenged the Brothers to be men of faith and zeal, and to live this spirit*

*“together and by association.” His Christmas Letter of 1984 was extremely well received by the Brothers and has contributed significantly to the ongoing process of strengthening our prayer life.*

Of the General Council of which he himself had been a member, Brother John writes:

*...You have provided bold and creative leadership; the Brothers have respected that leadership; they have responded to it; and the Institute is better as a result. In the name of the Capitulants, in the name of all our Brothers throughout the world, I want to say, thank you.*

## ***Section Two***

### **Brother John Johnston, Superior General 1986 -1993**

#### **1. The 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter**

The 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter took place between April 7<sup>th</sup> and June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1986. It was a carefully prepared Chapter as one of its chief responsibilities was that of approving the final draft of the Rule ad experimentum which, following the directions from the Second Vatican Council, had been followed on a trial basis for the past 20 years. An international Rule commission had been convoked in 1983-1984 and an interim draft of its work had been submitted to the General Council and to the Institute for further comment. A second draft, amended from the comments received, would be the task of the Chapter to approve, prior to submitting it to the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS) for its approval. The version once approved would become the Rule of the Institute.

The Report of the General Council 1976 – 1986 document (to which Brother John contributed), entitled From the General Council to the General Chapter, states its “necessary point of departure” as an “evaluation and the objective and sincere appreciation of our present reality, which will, in turn shed light on and guide the decisions which must be made.”

The context of the Chapter was envisaged in terms of two realities:

The entire Church has been solemnly invited to a careful consideration of the years that have transpired since Vatican II. A worldwide effort has developed to analyze the twenty years that followed the Council, to see if it has been properly understood and if its spirit and guidance have been translated into the life of the Church.

We set ourselves to examine and approve the new text of our Constitutions, written during the experimental phase twenty years ago in the light of that same Council and inspired by its teachings. The study of the draft of the Rule has given us the opportunity to analyze our vocation and our mission, our “specific definition” in the Church. During this Chapter we must continue this examination even more responsibly.

The Report of the General Council is offered with a clear synthesis in the following terms:

We see ourselves as:

1. A community of consecrated persons
  - 2.1 Associated in a Community of Faith,
  - 2.2 which exercises an Ecclesial Ministry of Evangelization,
  - 2.3 as Educators
  - 2.4 with the service of the poor as a first priority,
  - 2.5 which service is extended to the Missions
  - 2.6 and is shared with others
3. Fully aware of the Importance of a Good Formation
4. and with structures of Government that guarantee Unity and Fidelity.

This Report is calm and invitational in tone. Compared with the polarized positions experienced in the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chap-

ter, in the interim Visitors' meeting of 1971 and in the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, this Report is clear and unanimous in its orientations, recognizes without complacency that much has been achieved, and calls the Institute to continue the directions in which progress has already been made.

There were, however in 1983, two important Church documents which now had to be taken into consideration, one from the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes entitled *Essential Elements in Religious Life*, and the other the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law, both documents much more restrictive than had been anticipated. In 1984, an International Rules Commission was named to prepare the final version of the Brothers' Rule to conclude the 20 years ad experimentum for approval by the 1986 General Chapter. The new categories imposed by the Code of Canon Law meant that what had previously been carried since 1967 by the Rule and the Book of Government had now to be formulated in one book around the Code's own understanding – not the Institute's traditional understanding – of its designated categories of Constitutions and Statutes.

## **2. May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1986: Brother John begins his leadership as Superior General**

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, therefore, Brother John's life took another direction when the Chapter delegates elected him Superior General by a substantial majority on the first ballot. The chronicle of the Chapter has preserved Brother John's first words to the Chapter following his election:

*Thirty-seven years ago when I was a young boy in the Brothers' school in Memphis, the Brother who was our teacher told us one day*

*that he was going to be transferred. We were very disappointed. It is evident that he was also. But he said something to us that I have never forgotten, something simple but profound: ‘The good Lord does some strange things sometimes but He always knows what he is doing.’*

*Ten years ago – and again today – the Lord did something strange! All I can say is that I HOPE He knows what he is doing! The expectations of the Brothers are so great that I can’t help but feel somewhat overwhelmed. As I look around the room at the portraits of past Superiors, and think that you have placed me in their company, I feel very unworthy indeed. ... I am well aware of my faults and limitations: spiritual, intellectual, emotional; I know that I am weak in languages. At the same time, I am conscious of certain gifts the Lord has given me. But I can say that I am neither pessimistic because of my limitations nor optimistic because of my gifts. I shall simply try to be the Lord’s instrument.... I want to thank those Brothers who voted for me. As for those of you who preferred another candidate, let me say that I understand perfectly your position. Now, Brothers, I ask all of you, regardless of whom you voted for, to give me your support, your prayers, and your patience – and to be realistic in your expectations.*

In his introduction to the 1987 Institute Bulletin No. 229 that treated of the Chapter, it is certainly no longer the “apprentice” but a very confident and encouraging Brother John who remarks:

*The chronicle will help the readers of the Bulletin to understand the Chapter not only in terms of the documents and messages that resulted from it, but also in terms of the human story that it was, the story of men very conscious of having been chosen by their confrères to represent them: men vividly aware of their great responsibility to*

*search in the presence of God for the meaning of the Brothers' vocation in this changed and changing world; men from distinctly different cultures as well as socio-economic and political conditions; men speaking a variety of languages – all struggling to communicate... I believe that this Chapter was, for several reasons, an important moment in the history of the Institute.*

Brother John instances three things that make this 1986 Chapter so important in the sequence that begins with the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, continues with the 40<sup>th</sup> and now challenges the Institute after the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter:

1. the revision of the Brother's Rule;
2. the Message of the Chapter to the Brothers;
3. the Chapter message to the Lasallian Family.

With regard to the Rule, he states again what has become his leitmotif since his presentation to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, namely that “this process was essentially one of our asking ourselves in the presence of the Lord who it is He wants us to be today, what it is He wants us to do, and how it is He wants us to do it.” We will read and hear this phrase spoken many times in Brother John's addresses to the Institute.

Brother John sees the importance of the Message to the Brothers because “apostolic Institutes in general, and the Brothers of the Christian Schools in particular, face a significant period in their history: significant because of the quickly evolving role of the laity in the mission of the Church... (and) this evolving role of the laity means that men and women in apostolic religious institutes must re-examine their own historic roles.” This is an important perception which is probably the fruit of Brother John's regular contact with the heads of other religious congregations, men and women,

through the Union of Superiors General and through the important sequence of SEDOS meetings that saw its membership rapidly expanding during the past decade.

As regards the Lasallian Family, Brother John writes, “for the first time in the history of the Institute, a General Chapter addressed all those associated with us, inviting them to share our Lasallian heritage, to live Lasallian spirituality with us, and to help make our schools the Christian schools that St. De La Salle wanted them to be.”

We can see quite clearly Brother John’s vision for the Institute in the words he addressed, just two days after his election, to Pope John Paul II at the special audience extended to the Chapter delegates on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Brother John affirms the traditional loyalty of the Institute to the Pope, offers from the Meditations for the Time of Retreat a clear perspective as to how and why our Institute came into being, emphasizes how an ongoing conversion of heart will keep us oriented to the Founder’s purpose, and insists (once again) that “we are asking ourselves who it is the Lord wants us to be and what it is He wants us to do with our lives.”

Brother John’s concluding remarks to the Chapter on June 3<sup>rd</sup> set out clearly the ‘policy’ he feels the Chapter has confided to him and to his Council. Here, in summary form, are his points of emphasis:

- We are sons of the same Father, John Baptist de La Salle;
- Our two months General Chapter has been a family celebration;
- We thank God for the leadership, the credibility, of Brother Pablo and his Councilors, especially Brother Patrice;

- Our new Rule brings to a successful conclusion a long process “of discerning who it is God wants us to be, what it is He wants us to do, and how he wants us to do it”;
- The themes that will determine to a large extent our priorities, goals, objectives, and programs during the next seven years:
  - Association and interdependence;
  - Our role as evangelizers, catechists and youth ministers;
  - Our solidarity with the poor;
  - The Lasallian Family movement;
  - Finality and the spirit of the Institute, “both faith and zeal are essential elements of our spirit”;
  - Means for growth in the Spirit;
  - A Brother with the Spirit, “lived in profound association”;
  - “Thank God for the grace he has given you of sharing in the ministry of the Apostles.”

## **2.1 Tribute to the leadership of Brother José Pablo**

Brother John’s tribute to the “great gift of leadership” provided by Brother José Pablo and his General Council is perceptive in that it points to the important changes quietly achieved during these ten years. It also points to Brother John’s objective appraisal of what he had seen and lived in his ten years as Vicar General :

*“... I commented on another characteristic of Brother Pablo’s leadership. It is a characteristic that a leader cannot strive for directly. It is rather a judgment that is made on his leadership. This characteristic is credibility (emphasis added). It is a compliment of the hig-*

*hest order to say to Brother Pablo and to the members of the General Council that their leadership enjoyed the credibility of the Brothers. They held him and his Council in high esteem, finding in them a sense of direction and hope, and a source of unity and strength.”*

Although Brother John states that he will not single out members of the Council for individual comment, he does so with regard to Brother Patrice Marey:

*“I want to pay special tribute to the man who for the past twenty years has given himself and his extraordinary gifts of intelligence, leadership, organization, and profound love for the Founder and for the Institute unreservedly to the service of the Lord and of the Institute and its mission. I am referring, of course, to Brother Patrice...”*

This warm tribute comes from the fact that, in Brother John’s first years of ‘apprenticeship’ after his election as Vicar General in 1976, Brother Patrice, in the frequent absences of Brother Pablo, was Brother John’s mentor and guide in the preparation and publication of the official Circulars, as well as his frequent companion in the Pastoral visits made to France, England and Ireland, the United States, Canada and other Districts.

## **2.2 Brother John’s Leadership**

What was the opinion of those who formed the Council community with Brother John and lived and worked with him in the General Council from 1986-1993? Brother Joseph Hendron, former Councilor, writes of Brother John’s leadership style:

*He was an able and hard-working administrator. Important and varied administrative tasks faced him daily as Superior General; he kept abreast of so many matters. I was often surprised and amazed*

*at his grasp of detail in any topic he dealt with. He was in close touch with the life and world-wide mission of the Institute. Sectors caught up in violence, war or natural disasters would be contacted immediately and where needed and possible, financial help provided. He took a keen unbiased interest in the politics, power play and social systems of the different countries – particularly as these affected the lives of our Brothers and the poor.... The appointment of Visitors or leaders from the short list of three sent by Sectors was never a brief AOB item. He had a sincere regard and respect for the local Institute and its legitimate autonomy: the culture, history, traditions, educational system and so on. Nevertheless, appointment to a responsible position was a serious matter for himself and the Council; it was never just automatic approval. The Councilor for the sector and other relevant people would be consulted. ...it did happen from time to time, that results of elections were returned to Sectors for reconsideration or clarification; occasionally Brothers from the sector were invited to Rome for further discussions. He had confidence to follow through on these things because he knew the local scene and those involved very well. Sessions for new Visitors were held every two to three years at which information and policies and procedures were discussed. They provided John further opportunity to get to know people and situations better.*

Brother Joseph continues his appraisal of Brother John's leadership by pointing out how consistent he was in insisting on taking local autonomy as far as it could be taken. This was his deep understanding of one of the key words in the Church and in the Institute in the wake of Vatican II and the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter – subsidiarity, i.e., never doing at a higher level what should be decided at a lower level.

Some decisions should be made locally and not handed on to Rome for solution because of disagreements locally. On the

other hand it was not for him and the Council to reverse decisions that had been seriously and prayerfully discerned by local administration... From time to time the withdrawal of a Community from a particular place would result in sacks of letters from parents, students (what adult letters seven year olds could write!), clergy, civil authorities, even the local Community, requesting the Superior General to reverse the decision. But John would have none of it... It had to be followed through and he would give full support to the local administration in doing so.... He could face and make the 'hard' decisions.

Another of his Councilors recalls a question/answer session with parents where there was some resentment about the fact, as one parent put it, "I've sent my child to your school and even after two years he hasn't had a Brother to teach him. What are you going to do about that?" Brother John had no hesitation in answering the question with his own question: "Are you ready to send your son to join the Brothers to help us out of this situation?"

Brother Joseph's comment on Brother John's leadership continues:

*He was impatient of dithering, confusion or muddle and this would sometimes show in his body language. But he could sustain uncertainty with calmness and patience when further information was needed before reaching important decisions. At times it was difficult to see any satisfactory outcome, and he could live with that too. After wrestling with a problem for an hour or more in a Council Meeting and no conclusion being in sight, he would say something like: 'We'll leave this for now and come back to it later after prayer and further reflection. We mustn't force a hasty decision.' One had a feeling of genuine discernment taking place. However, where the re-*

*solution of a less weighty matter was evident, he could cut short repetitious and redundant discussion very quickly, sometimes to the surprise of his listeners.*

### **2.3 Brother John organizes his Council**

One of the significant changes decided by the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter was that the 10 years period between General Chapters was now considered too long in a time of rapid cultural change. Although there had been meetings of Visitors after 5 years (1961; 1971; 1981), the limitation of such meetings was that, although they could offer a mid-term evaluation, they had no legislative power to change anything. Where previously, the Brother Assistants generally came from specific linguistic and cultural areas, the 10 years experience of a Council, reduced from sixteen members to six, had shown that the Brothers elected to form this smaller General Council needed to be able to work with at least four languages - French, Spanish, English and Italian - and as most needed some time to gain sufficient competence in these languages - some delegates considered a six year term too short. The discussion ranged between those advocating six years (as many other religious congregations were doing in order to synchronize the appointment of provincials, usually three years) and those in favor of retaining the traditional ten years. The compromise of seven years was eventually proposed and voted by the Chapter.

As a double visitation of the whole Institute in the next seven years by Brother Superior and Councilors was still envisaged, Brother John took the initiative of proposing a more organized coordination of the work of the Council and that of the principal secretariats - Formation, Secoli, Educa-

tion, Government, Finance – by forming an Enlarged Council that included the heads of these secretariats working directly with the Brother Superior and Council around particular themes.

As distinct from the previous Council which had included the four members responsible for the permanent positions in Rome (Secretary General, Econome, Postulator and Procurator), the community of the Council was now formed with the six elected members plus Brother John. As a Council, they were seven different nationalities, coming from districts in the United States, Argentina, Madagascar, France, Spain, Great Britain and Australia. Following the unexpected death of Brother Eugène Bodel in July 1987, Brother Pierre Josse was nominated to the Council.

Brother John, in the light of his own experience, suggested that the Council make use of a separate dining room only when particular circumstances demanded it. While it had been envisaged that the Brother Superior and Council would not have any fixed places in the resident community dining room, this did not seem to suit either the community members or the Councilors, although some Councilors occasionally profited by the freedom to augment their language skills at a particular table. The Council also established its own chapel on the same floor as the Council room. Twice each week, the Council organized its own prayer and celebration of Eucharist apart from that of the Central community, in which they otherwise shared.

In meeting his newly-elected Councilors together for the first time, Brother John shared his overall vision of their role in words similar to the following:

*“You are probably thinking that much of your work will be concentrated here in Rome... This is only partly true. You will work here but your real work is to be concerned and informed about everything that is happening throughout the whole Institute. You will be asked to have a close liaison with certain parts of the Institute, but you must not allow yourself to think of this as your main work. You need to be close to all sections of the Institute.”*

Given that the role of Brother Superior and Council was to form a community at the Center of the Institute, Brother John and his Council made their own Community Annual Program, chose designated responsibilities and synchronized their calendars so that they were all to be present in Rome for at least four months each year. They established their annual retreat for a certain date and set themselves as well three other periods when they would hold a recollection outside of their usual residence.

Brother John assumed the role of Director of the community and established times for regular interviews with each Brother Councilor in terms of the particular responsibilities of each. This was particularly important when the Councilor had recently returned from some mission away from Rome. These interviews were always held in comfortable chairs away from the Brother Superior’s desk and were often open-ended, affording opportunity for personal conversation and comment apart from the more formal aspects.

Brother Joseph Hendron, one of the members of this Council wrote of Brother John:

*He was a private person, but it was obvious that his own spiritual life was a priority. However busy with administrative affairs they did not dislodge time set aside for prayer. He was faithful to perso-*

*nal prayer time, often in the small Council oratory when he was in Rome. He took his turn at preparing the Community prayer and Liturgy of the General Council. This was a priority, not a tiresome rota chore to be taken hastily or lightly. The Scriptures, the Founder and spiritual writers figured very much in his preparations and presentations. He lived what the Founder wrote: make no distinction between the work of your salvation and, in his case, the work of administration and all its demands.*

### **3. Improved Communication with the Institute 1986-1993**

If one of the momentous changes of the 1976 Chapter as regards the General Council was to change the role whereby Brother Assistants were responsible for large territorial sections of the Institute, one limitation of the 'team visits' made between 1976 and 1986 by two or three Councilors with the Brother Superior or Vicar, was that these visits were necessarily of short duration and usually depended on large groupings of Brothers being assembled at some point away from their individual communities. Some Brothers expressed their feelings that they had 'lost' what they considered their closer relationship with someone from the Center. Brother John's reflections on his experience made him very conscious of the need to improve the two-way communication that would keep the Council better informed through these official visits but would also improve the quality of the communication from the Center to the Brothers and to the Lasallian Family.

The quality of the publications that followed the 1976 Chapter - Circulars 403, 404, 406, 408, 410, 412 - was outstanding in terms of the presentation of content, and the creati-

vity of the different exercises within the Dossiers which engaged the reader in an ongoing dialogue with the movement of the Institute. Looked at today from the viewpoint of modern publications, however, these Circulars with an unattractive grey cover relied solely on many pages of print plus tables/diagrams of various kinds and, perhaps for a variety of different reasons, failed to achieve the result they undoubtedly deserved. As Brother John had been one of the most active participants in helping to produce these circulars, he was keen to improve the quantity and quality of communication. He aimed to make the Institute documents more attractive, less print-based and open to the wider audience of the Lasallian Family, not exclusively as before, to the Brothers.

### ***3.1 Institute Bulletins***

Brother John, therefore, set up a Publications Commission under the general supervision of the Secretary General and appointed one of the Councilors as a full-time member so that the Council was kept aware of the content of each publication and could give input and suggest themes/content to the Commission. Brother John aimed, especially through frequent and more attractive editions of the Institute Bulletin, to keep the Institute more aware of the work being done throughout the Institute. The titles during these seven years give some idea of his intention of strengthening the morale of the Brothers in general by sharing information about what was being done throughout the Institute:

- Bulletin No. 229, March 1987: a full-color presentation on the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter;

- Bulletin No. 230, June 1988: Under the title *Young People and Pastoral Care*, there are 11 experiences of what was being done around the world, “offered for your reflection”;
- Bulletin No. 231, December 1988: *The Regions of the Institute* which describes the way each is constituted and the way each has begun to function;
- Bulletin No. 233, January 1991: The title of *Interdependence in the Institute* treats the move from “subsidiarity” to “interdependence” that would create the financial and human resources to support the Missionary Policy of the Institute;
- Bulletin No. 234, April 1991: *Literacy and Cultural Development Projects* treating of the award of the UNESCO Noma Prize to the Institute in the United Nations Year of Literacy;
- Bulletin No. 235, September-November 1991: *The Heroic Vow, the Seed of Vitality* concerning the significance for the vow today;
- Bulletin No. 236, April 1992: *Higher Education in Our Institute* offers information from 13 countries where the Institute is involved in tertiary education of various kinds;
- Bulletin No. 237, October 1992: *De La Salle Brothers on the American Continent* offers perspectives from Canada, the US-Toronto Region and Latin America;
- Bulletin No.238, April 1993: *The Brothers of the Christian Schools in Africa* details the work of the Brothers in both the French-speaking and English-speaking sections of Africa.

Brother John was also far-sighted in seeing the importance of making use of modern technology in the Casa Generalizia.

Already as Vicar General he had learned word processing by making use of the first mainframe computer installed by the Bursar General, René Hamel, to help with the Institute finances. He therefore encouraged his new Councilors to become computer literate and eventually within a few years of taking office, had personal computers installed to help the Councilors and various secretariats, especially the translation pool. When, in 1987, one of his Councilors was offered a fax machine, Brother John accepted it enthusiastically and before long, communication by fax was added to the communication system of the Institute.

### **3.2 Institute Circulars**

It is worth noting next the chronology and the subject matter of the principal Circular Letters to the Institute between 1986 and 1993. These were published in the traditional format. Brother John also continued the Institute's tradition of Pastoral Letters each Christmas but these will be treated separately.

#### ***July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1986: 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter***

The first publication to communicate with the Institute about the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter was Circular 422, published on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1986 under the title *The 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter: Propositions and Messages*. The fact that this detailed official report came only some weeks after the conclusion of the Chapter seems to reflect Brother John's own experience after 1976 when the delay in publishing the Propositions and Decisions of the Chapter until late October 1976 had, as already noted, caused him some personal embarrassment.

## **October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1986: A Progress Report**

The second publication, Circular 423, entitled *A Progress Report*, appeared on October 7<sup>th</sup> 1986. It is a document still in the traditional format. It is a remarkably comprehensive document because Brother John, with the help of his Council certainly, but very much in the light of his own experience of the previous 10 years, offers his own clear vision and detailed planning to establish the bases for the next seven years. It is worth noting the following introduction:

*This circular, Brothers, was not planned in advance. It has simply evolved. What was planned was a letter of a pastoral nature from the Brother Superior to the Regionals, Visitors, Auxiliary Visitors, Delegates, and Presidents of Delegations. It had been our intention to append to that letter certain information that might prove interesting to the Brothers. ... But the quantity of material that we would like to share with you has steadily increased... we want to let all the Brothers know our general organizational structure, as well as our plans for the immediate future.*

The contents of this Letter that follow the Introduction include the following sections:

- Letter from the Superior General to the Regionals, Visitors. Auxiliary Visitors, Delegates, Chairmen of Delegations.
- An update on Our New Rule with reference to certain changes requested by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes to comply with the wording of the new Canon Law;
- General Council: Planning and Organization
  1. Organization of the General Services
  2. Visits to Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts, Delegations (Calendar of dates)

3. Major Themes for 1986 /1987 [emphases in visits and publications]
4. The Personal Program (project)
5. The Enlarged Council [an advisory body to the Council]
6. Our FSC Missionary Commitment
7. The Lasallian Family
8. Renewal Program for Visitors and Other Heads of Services
9. The Pastoral Ministry of Vocations and Initial Formation
  - Calendar of Visits
  - Concluding Remarks

#### Appendix

- the annual report for 1987
- the Lasallian Family
- Preparation of Animators for Senior Brothers

The deliberate policy behind this detailed plan is expressed in the last paragraph of the Introduction:

*Brothers, we are grateful to you for keeping us well-informed of your plans and programs, as well as of significant developments in your district. This circular is our way of reciprocating (emphasis added). We hope you will find it useful.*

The Letter to the various office-holders referred to in the title is called The Ministry of Animation. Brother John makes the word ‘animation’ one of his favorite expressions, justifying its use as follows:

*I like the word ‘animation’ even though it presents some difficulties for English speakers. The origin of the word; ‘animation’ is clear and*

*suggests immediately, life, breath, spirit, courage, vitality. Webster's dictionary defines "to animate" as "to give spirit and support to; to encourage; to give life, vigor, or zest to; move to action."*

*I cannot conceive of a better description of our particular ministry. We are called, Brothers, to foster life and spirit, to encourage, to challenge, to inspire, to invigorate, to move to action.*

### **April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1987: Our Rule (Circular 424)**

Having already announced on February 5<sup>th</sup> the approval of the Rule by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS), Brother John, after working with his Councilors on the topic, now presented "the complete and final text of the *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*" around five main headings:

- Our Rule, a living history
- Our Rule, an expression of our communion with the Church
- Our Rule, "Book of Life" of the Brother of the Christian Schools
- Our Rule, the word which unifies our lives
- The Rule is confided to us

The document also contains the complete exchange of letters between the Institute and SCRIS between June 12<sup>th</sup> 1986 and the Decree of Approbation of January 26<sup>th</sup> 1987.

### **February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1989: Letter to the Lasallian Family**

This document of February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1989 was published in the same traditional format as the Institute Circulars but it was

not given a sequential number, possibly because of it being addressed to an audience, wider than the Brothers of the Institute. As it was the first document on which the members of the General Council contributed as a group, it was worked on at various times when Brother John and all the Councilors were present. Brother Genaro Saenz de Ugarte, Vicar-General, was the co-ordinator of the project as Brother John had entrusted him with the encouragement of activities and documents regarding the development of the Lasallian Family. Just as the Message from the Chapter was a new moment in our history as Brother John said, so too was this document as it explored the present and imagined a possible future. Through eight sections plus an appendix containing a questionnaire, the document explored how the story of John Baptist de La Salle could guide us by offering some guidelines in offering a response to the particular needs of our time. The document recognized the rich diversity of the Lasallian groups which were “different but associated,” making explicit recognition for the first time of Lasallians who were not Christian. There were suggestions as to how to promote the “unity and vitality” of the Lasallian Family, especially through a seven-stage questionnaire that required a detailed working through the different chapters of the Circular.

### ***June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1990: The Personal Programme (Circular 429)***

This Circular was written in fulfillment of the promise made in Circular 423 that, because of the novelty of the Personal Programme, “we would develop the theme at a later date.” The teaching was offered in five sections plus an appendix with a number of models of how this personal programme might be elaborated.

- A Certain historical perspective
- Our Founder and his “Life Plan”
- The Rule and the Personal Programme
- What the Personal Programme implies
- Personal Programme and Community Programme

Besides the above Circulars, Brother John also had issued in his name, Circular Letters that commemorated the deaths of Brothers who had held important offices in the Institute. We read in No. 426, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1987, his introduction to the text of Brother Michel Sauvage following the death of Brother Maurice-Auguste:

*It is time we spoke to the Brothers of the Institute about Brother Maurice Auguste: he played such an important role in making the Founder and the history of our Institute known, and in so many other areas of Lasallian research. In time, others will write at greater length about his life and his work: in the meanwhile, this short account is overdue.*

A month later, in No. 428, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1987, Brother John pays tribute to Brother Eugène Bodel, elected a member of the Council at the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter, who died unexpectedly just over a year later:

*The sudden death of Brother Eugène Bodel on the morning of July 12<sup>th</sup> 1987 was a great shock for all the Brothers, but more especially for the members of the general Council to whose community he had belonged for just over a year.*

### **3.3 Brother John’s Pastoral Letters 1986 – 1993**

As Superior General, Brother John continued the tradition of addressing a personal Letter to the Brothers of the Insti-

tute on New Year's Day. As regards content, it is in these Letters that we find the most consistent development of a particular theme for each year, although, in practice, most letters return almost inevitably at some point to what he considers the essential challenges already expressed in his presentation to the 1976 General Chapter, even to the extent of frequently citing his mentor, John Futrell S.J. The one reference point of all the Letters, however, is the new Rule. Throughout the next seven years, Brother John is masterly in introducing different facets of the Rule to show the unity of the whole document. The Letters often comment as well on certain topical issues in the life of the Institute, the Church or the contemporary world, but the reference point is ultimately the importance of the Institute embracing what the Church has so enthusiastically endorsed.

As regards style, the Letters are clearly expressed, easy to follow and usually give the impression that they were meant also to be heard. Key words are often highlighted by capital letters or in black. The tone is often exhortatory, at times deeply personal, but is always that of someone who projects himself as a leader who is looking for a response, indeed a commitment, from the reader. While Brother John does not hesitate to express his personal opinion, the reader is constantly invited by the use of we and our to feel part of a family conversation and discussion. In the seven Letters to be examined here, there are recurring themes and even whole phrases that seem to flow unconsciously from the writer's pen.

### ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1987. Peace – Identity - Conversion***

Brother John continues the tradition of greeting the Brothers with a salutation from Saint Paul, in this instance,

“May God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace.” (1 Cor 1-3). He mentions the recent Synod on the Laity and the proclamation of Brother Arnould as Blessed. He allows himself some strong expressions that seem to indicate a certain impatience that his lead is not being followed by some Brothers:

*... some of us are fearful of what is today and what might be tomorrow; others of us are discouraged, even to the point of an almost passive resignation to trends and situations that are negative in character. Still others seem to me to be disillusioned, polarized, or angry; a few of us, I sense, harbor a bitterness that gnaws at us constantly and surfaces periodically in comments or behavior that are far from helpful or constructive. (Page 4)*

As he develops the theme of men of Hope and Peace, Brother John becomes more positive when he writes:

*What the Lord wants of us, Brothers, is that we live as men convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ; as men who say YES to what is rather than dream nostalgically of what was or fantasize on what could be; as men who prefer ‘to light a candle rather than curse the darkness,’ that is to say, as men who are prepared to ACT, men who are prepared to DO SOMETHING and to do it creatively... (page 6).*

As the Letter continues with the confirmation of the Brother’s identity as conferred by the approbation of the new Rule and with some indications of the dialogue of the Institute with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS), Brother John offers the Rule as the basis for the “profound conversion” requested of the Institute in the Capitulants’ Message to the Institute. His favorite expression already noted emerge again as he refers again to the strong consensus that,

*in addition to articulating clearly and unambiguously who it is we are called to be and what it is we are called to do (the Rule), this chapter had to challenge the Brothers to BE the people God wants us to be...*

The exhortation on ‘conversion’ is strongly and logically developed. The tone, however, jars somewhat when Brother John allows himself to express an obvious value judgment about whether certain Brothers really accept their consecration to Apostolic obedience:

*“Without intending to be sarcastic, I must say that I have the impression at times that some of us... instead of being at the disposition of the Institute ... suppose that the Institute is at our disposition...” (page21)*

A similar jarring note occurs in the discussion on Our life together where he writes:

*“...I have the impression that at times some of us perceive our communities as ‘service stations’ along the ‘highway’ of our daily life... Forgive me if that sounds sarcastic...” (page 24)*

It is worth noting these two instances in Brother John’s first Letter as Superior General. Do they reflect, perhaps, the impatience of a convinced leader wishing almost to shame his Brothers into action rather than convince them? Certainly, nothing similar in tone is found in the subsequent Pastoral Letters.

### ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988. The Destiny of the Institute: Our Responsibility***

After the usual salutation, Brother John offers some introductory remarks and comments on issues during 1987 that

have touched the Institute. He mentions once again the death of Brother Maurice-Auguste and pays tribute to the important legacy he has left to the Institute through his pioneer work in Lasallian Studies. He recalls also the unexpected death of Brother Eugène Bodel, one of his Councilors. Brother John calls 1987 An Extraordinary Year and remarks,

*I am filled with gratitude, together with renewed conviction that God is truly with us as we strive to become more and more the men he wants us to be, in order to fulfill the precious mission he has confided to us.*

Brother John sees the task for 1988 as intentionalization and commitment to what is expressed in the new Rule. He justifies the use of the word ‘destiny’ because the Rule itself uses it and shows that the approbation of the Rule is the conclusion of a process that really began forty years ago as a decision of the 1946 General Chapter. He points out that

*“This moment is historic because after years of prayerful and sometimes painful discernment, we have arrived at a common understanding and common expression of who we believe God wants us to be, what we believe he wants us to do, and how we believe he wants us to live.”*

Brother John continues by pointing out that the “we” of the above citation is quite deliberate because our new Rule is not something that was handed down from above – by a Superior or General Council, by a commission, or even by a General Chapter.

The text continues by Brother John developing four specific themes of his closing address to the General Chapter:

1. Association and interdependence;
2. Evangelization, Catechesis, Pastoral Ministry of Youth;

3. Solidarity with the Poor;

4. A Shared Mission

The tone of the Letter is quite different from that noted in the 1987 Letter.

*I am happy to have this opportunity to express my personal appreciation of the genuine spirit of brotherhood that I perceive in the Institute today.*

The text continues with this appreciative tone for international brotherhood shown in the generosity of the regions and districts in supplying personnel and resources at the request of the Brother Superior and Council. Brother John states his own preference for a permanent regional or coordinator in order to help the development of Regions.

As the other themes are developed, Brother John makes use of the articles of the Rule to show their spiritual depth and the continuing challenge they present. He reminds the Brothers of De La Salle's major decision to break definitively with Rheims and all its securities to come to Paris:

*Brothers, let us find in this important historical event a fundamental source of inspiration for ourselves today. We need similar vision, faith, and courage to "let go" of whatever is holding us back and move off in the direction indicated to us by our new Rule.*

### **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1989. Solidarity**

Having made reference to Pope John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Re Socialis* and his use of the word solidarity, Brother John traces the movement in language that has taken the Institute via subsidiarity to association; from association to co-responsibility; from co-responsibility to interdependence; from

interdependence to solidarity. He sees solidarity linked with the “living tradition” that requires of us “to know, understand, accept and interiorize the new Rule” but insists that this is not simply for disciplinary reasons:

*Some might expect that I give this priority the rank of ‘fundamental importance’ because the Rule can be a valuable instrument in strengthening religious discipline. While I am not going to dispute our need for greater religious discipline, I have a different, and I think, more important reason for insisting that deepening our knowledge of the Rule and our commitment to it is a priority of fundamental importance.*

The argument continues that the recent approbation given to the Rule by the official Church, states our solidarity with the Founder and the “living tradition” of the Institute. Brother John agrees with the Declaration statement (7.3) that there can be no question of “refounding” the Institute. He prefers to use “language that places the accent on continuity instead of on discontinuity.” This responsibility is not given to us as individuals but as an Institute (Declaration 7.2). Such a community search Brother John expresses in familiar terms as:

*We have, therefore, Brothers, ‘together and by association’ expressed who we believe God wants us to be today, what he believes he wants us to do, and how we believe he wants us to live.*

Later in the Letter, Brother John, acknowledging that there are different attitudes with regard to the directions the Institute has taken through the 20 years of experimentation, makes use of the expression used by an important contemporary United States philosopher, Allan Bloom, in his influential book, *The Closing of the American Mind*:

*I know that much of what I have said ... is in conflict with a certain moral relativism which has almost inevitably affected the way many of us understand and interpret, perhaps unconsciously, norms and standards.... We have been almost unbelievably tolerant of ideas and behaviors that contradict our own descriptions of ourselves. (page 17)*

Brother John continues to explore how the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter in its call for “conversion” rejected this model of “doing one’s own thing” (independence) just as it had rejected the idea of dependence. The balance is to be found in the Rule’s insistence (No. 102) that

*“in a spirit of collaboration and fraternal help, the superiors foster a spirit of initiative and a sense of responsibility in each of the Brothers in the areas under their charge.”*

The final stage of the Letter places the emphasis on various forms of solidarity, especially that with the poor. Brother John anticipates the forthcoming beatification of Brother Scubilion as an example of how far this idea of solidarity can take us as members of the Institute serving the Church.

### ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1990. Representing Jesus Christ Himself Identity and Prayer***

In this Letter, Brother John recalls the importance of the beatification of Brother Scubilion and the canonization of Brother Mutien-Marie. He is interested in reflecting on the importance of the “images” that De La Salle used in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat and returns again via Vatican II to the emphasis of his 1976 presentation to insist on the need to recognize the “model” of integration of the constitutive dimensions of the Brother’s life, consecration, apostolic

ministry and community life, as expressed now in the Rule, No. 10. Under the heading A Clear Dichotomy Brother John reiterates that “ through a certain interpretation of the formula of primary and secondary end, we lost sight of De La Salle’s model.”

This integration requires a certain balance and discipline to which Brother John invites his Brothers in familiar words:

*Brothers, our unity and effectiveness as an international religious family at the service of the Church requires that we have a common understanding of who we believe God wants us to be and what we believe he wants us to do. In short, we need a common theoretical understanding of what it means to be a Brother. For this reason we have reflected upon the images that lead us to De La Salle’s ‘model’ of the vocation of the Brother.*

As Brother John develops from the Meditations for the Time of Retreat this model of the Brother as a Man of Prayer, he concentrates also on the Brother as a “man of faith”, filled with an “ardent zeal” (mentioned forty-six times in the MTR, he recalls), who sees mental prayer as the first and principal of their daily exercises. The Letter continues to reflect on the personal prayer of the Brother but looks also at the prayer of the community and the attention to Scripture as the word of God. Brother John profits by the recent publication by Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos of the commentary of De La Salle’s Method of Mental Prayer to draw attention to its teaching.

***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1991. Irrevocably committed to follow Christ, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow***

Brother John begins this Letter by reminding the Brothers

that the geographical spread of the Institute means that it shares the difficulties of the various parts of the world where it is established. Having recalled the conflicts, wars and general sufferings undergone in various countries, he recalls the martyr Brothers of Turon and Brother Jaime Hilario in Tarragona as exemplars of how to face a crisis. This leads him to recall the forthcoming 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the so-called “heroic vow” of 1691 and the materials that will be provided for its commemoration. Brother John refers also to the current session of Lasallian Studies (SIEL), a new edition of the Institute Bulletin on “interdependence” and another on the Institute’s response to the United Nations Year of Literacy; the meeting of new Visitors, the CIL session on Religious Consecration, the seminar for Lasallian Youth, and a session for Directors of Novices.

From his attendance by invitation as an Observer at the Synod on Priesthood, Brother John was impressed by the centrality “of the issue of priestly identity.” This is certainly related to the emphasis since Vatican II on the laity and the recent document, Lay People Faithful to Christ that followed the Synod on the Laity. Brother John cites an authority who considers that

*“the emphasis of Vatican II on the universal call of holiness and its insistence that religious life belongs not to the hierarchical but to the charismatic structure of the Church has unwittingly contributed to confusion concerning the meaning and significance of religious life.”*

Following this introduction, Brother John addresses the practical question of the relationship of the Brother with lay people in most of our educational works, suggesting that it

is seen “with attitudes... ranging from enthusiasm to begrudging resignation.” He addresses “the question of our identity and specific mission”, insisting that there is “no educational service that is reserved to us.” If this constitutes a “crisis” as the Institute faced in 1691, we need to give a concrete response, “to *Act* rather than *React*.” The following “guiding principles” are developed to face this crisis:

1. We have to understand and live authentically our vocation;
2. We must follow Christ as men of faith;
3. We must be Brothers;
4. We must “be attentive”...we must “be moved” (as De la Salle was ‘deeply moved”);
5. In union with our lay colleagues, we must continue the process of renewing our schools.

Brother John concludes his Letter with these words:

*Today, in the year 1991, we are suffering a severe crisis, one that has indeed shaken the confidence of not a few of us. The celebration of the “Heroic Vow” is a providential occasion for renewing our own “irrevocable commitment” to follow Christ as Brothers of the Christian Schools and to work creatively for the revitalization of our Institute.... “The need for this Institute is very great.”*

### **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992. Our Community Life Some Reflections**

After reviewing some contemporary events, especially the collapse of communism in eastern Europe and noting that 1991 was “a year of vitality in the Institute,” Brother John states his intention for this Letter as

*One of the areas of our life that calls for clarification of vision and renewed commitment is that of our community life... this document is not intended to be a comprehensive study of community life. Its objective is modest: it is to share some thoughts on some aspects of our community life in order to encourage your own personal and community reflection.*

The key to the treatment of the topic is Brother John's use of the expression from the document Lay People Faithful to Christ, "communion generates communion." (No. 39) He distinguishes between the sociological categories of "intentional and associational communities," seeing the Brothers called by their vocation to the former and recognizing that many committed lay Lasallians in Shared Mission would be better described by the second term.

In developing the Rule's description of a "Community of Faith", from the viewpoint of an "intentional" community, Brother John explores the following ideas:

1. Public profession of following Christ
2. Sharing the experience of God
3. Fidelity in our community life

Under the next heading of "An Apostolic Community", Brother John explores the "Witness" of such a community, how we can be builders of "Communities of Faith", and how our "Mission is to be discovered."

As a "Fraternal Community", it is important that "our expectations be authentic and realistic", that we be "proactive" i.e. forward looking rather than "reactive members," see our community as "Home" and "keep our Brothers in focus" through "the apostolate of encouragement."

## ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1993. Transformation Reflection on our Future***

In many ways, this Letter near the end of Brother John's term as Superior General is in the strongest contrast to his first such letter in 1987. It is perhaps, one of the best insights we have as to how Brother John has developed his own "pastoral" sense of addressing his Brothers in a challenging but also in an encouraging way as a "first among equals."

He points to the inevitable question which he and his Councilors find addressed to them in the meetings "we are privileged to have with the Brothers of the Institute": what is the "health of the Institute?" He points out the work already being done by the General Council in its preparation for the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter and then offers some personal impressions:

1. In general, we are proud to be Brothers.
2. Perhaps never before in our history have our Brothers manifested towards St. John Baptist de La Salle the degree of interest, respect and love that we manifest today.
3. Most of us are interested in and committed to the ongoing revitalization of our life of faith, prayer and community.
4. We find personal satisfaction in our apostolic activities: increasingly we accept our mission today as a "shared mission."
5. Many of us are confused about the specific role we should exercise as religious men and as communities and as Institute.
6. We find ourselves caught up in a vicious circle: the fewness of vocations is a source of discouragement and confusion: discouraged and confused Brothers do not attract vocations.

Brother John recalls that in his presentation on the “heroic vow” he pointed out that the “Founder and his two companions promised to DO, that is to say, to ACT. He then proposes five possible objectives for the General Chapter:

- the role of the Brother in ‘shared mission’;
- the evaluating every two weeks... of our lived experience of consecration, mission and community.
- The calling us again – as individuals and as communities, Districts and Institute – to spiritual conversion and transformation.
- The determining and articulating clearly, major priorities and objectives for the next seven years.
- The determining of effective strategies for realizing these objectives: strategies at every level.

Brother John then justifies his title of Transformation by referring to the preliminary report of the Study of the Future of Religious Orders in the United States by Nygren and Ukeritis. The researchers point to major differences in the understanding and responses of different religious orders, so that “if religious life is to continue... dramatic changes must occur” because there is “a lack of common goals and a common vision.” Brother John’s Letter then recognizes the progress the Institute has made in recent years and points to the need to “renew our minds”, to deepen the sense of our consecration through our consecrated celibacy, through our solidarity with the poor, through living as people of “modest condition”, through our association for the service of the poor through education, and increasingly today through our “shared mission” of human and Christian education. It should be noted that the development of Brother John’s

thought, even if it acknowledges some other source, comes back always to the concepts within the Rule and the language in which these concepts find expression.

Brother John concludes with the following words:

*We need to “believe” in the future of the Institute. As believers and men of hope, we have to offer ourselves as a “living sacrifice” to God, “be transformed by the light and fullness of grace,” and devote ourselves unreservedly to the authentic transformation of the Institute.”*

### **3.4 Overview**

Even in such a summary presentation of these Pastoral Letters, it is possible to appreciate the strong and consistent pastoral leadership that Brother John offered to the Brothers of his Institute in these seven years. His style of writing is best described as “direct.” Headings reflect the development of his thought, opening sentences of paragraphs indicate clearly what is to be developed, and the argumentation is clear. His widespread references to De La Salle’s own writings and his detailed knowledge of the Declaration and the Rule indicate many years of reflection and personal meditation on the content. Because his frame of reference - contemporary events, papal documents, the experience of synods and international meetings - is vast, Brother John’s teaching is consistent but it always has something fresh and relevant about it.

## **4. Visiting the Institute**

Brother John’s love for his Brothers and for the works carried out by the Institute around the Lasallian world was

shown in the detailed preparation he made for visiting the various sectors. He asked each unit of the Institute to send him photographs of each Brother and he had these individual photographs arranged as communities, prepared in booklets with plastic covers, with the names underneath each individual photo. Brother Councilors of this period all recall Brother John, on planes, in airports, studying these sheets so that he could greet each Brother by his own name. This was no “how to win friends and influence people” technique but a genuine desire to be able to call each man – his Brother – by the one thing that set him apart from others, his name! It was certainly appreciated by the Brothers themselves.

Another insight into Brother John’s preparation for these visits to countries other than those where English was spoken, was the way in which he carried with him the relevant Assimil or equivalent language booklet, or the relevant pocket dictionary for the country he was visiting. These books were extremely well-worn, eventually dog-eared, but it was with a profound sense of respect, humility and ‘service’ that Brother John did this: his attitude was always that of a learner who still has many things to learn.

Sometimes the very remoteness of the region being visited meant that the details of the Institute and the Chapter decisions were not necessarily known with the same rapidity or in the same way as Brother John would have wished. On arriving on one occasion in one such place in Asia, some two or so years after his election as Superior General, the accompanying Councilor could point out to Brother John that his portrait had been so recently hung on the wall that it was still moving while Brother Pablo’s had been consigned to the nearby corner. The Councilor reminded Brother John that

this was surely the equivalent of the burning flax presented to the newly-elected Pope with the Latin words, *Sic transit gloria mundi*, (So fades the world's glory). Brother John learned to appreciate the reference!

These pastoral visits were greatly appreciated by the Brothers. Brother John and his accompanying Councilor, however, had often to learn through experience how to pace themselves during a long visit, especially if the climate was difficult and the work requested became too demanding. One such visit in Asia, already 8 weeks in length and with Brother John and the Councilor both battling dysentery, was memorable because the meeting with the District Council that had been requested was so poorly organized that it had to be deferred. Brother John's fiery temper (which he had often to acknowledge) so got the better of him that he rebuked the Visitor and District Secretary in no uncertain terms, to the great embarrassment of all present. When the meeting resumed some hours later, however, Brother John, made a complete apology to the group without citing any of the quite 'legitimate' excuses he could have offered for the outburst. As the two Councilors continued their journey and discussed their experience, Brother John remarked, "we have to remember that from the viewpoint of each group we meet, we have come exclusively for them!"

## ***Section Three***

### **1. Brother John Johnston, Superior General 1993 – 2000**

#### ***1.1 The 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter***

Circular 433 had officially convoked the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter to begin on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993. There was a proposal, approved by a change in the Rule during the previous Chapter, that 20 Consultants – lay people and Sisters – be invited for a period of time in which they and the Capitulants would discuss the emerging topic of Shared Mission. Resolutions in this matter, however, in order to conform with Canon Law, would have to be taken later in the Chapter by the capitulants themselves.

A Preparatory Commission had been appointed to prepare the Chapter. Although this Commission had its proper autonomy, it was appointed by the Brother Superior and Council and had to have its proposals formally approved by them. This is worth noting because some of Brother John's own suggestions had a significant influence on some aspects of the Commission's work, especially with reference to Shared Mission. The Preparatory Commission had sent out a detailed questionnaire to the Institute to receive input on particular topics and, as usual, Brothers had been invited to send personal Notes if they so wished. A questionnaire had been very well prepared and was quite searching in its content. After its completion, the respondent was asked to reflect on some paragraphs which might encourage him to consider particular issues that could be drawn to the Chapter's attention by Notes:

*You have just given some thought to your life as a Brother of the Christian Schools. After completing the questionnaire, perhaps the overall impression that you have of it does not correspond with what you would like it to be. You have noticed that, since the last General Chapter, many changes have occurred in society, the Church, the Institute and young people. In your fellow human beings you see new needs, sufferings, misery, but also aspirations and desires to which, following the example of De La Salle, you would like to respond more fully, in union with your fellow Brothers. When you consider our Holy Founder, you feel that there is a discrepancy between the fabric of your daily life and the Lord's call which comes to you day after day... If this is the case, we invite you to use the form provided and, individually or collectively, write notes that you consider useful for the greater good of the Institute as a whole.*

This invitation was highly successful in that more than 600 notes were received by the preparatory Commission and formed an important part of the content of the Chapter. These Notes were translated into the three Institute languages -French, Spanish and English- and sent to the Chapter delegates three months in advance. The Chapter report by the Secretary General points out that one of the

*most insistent questions raised in the Notes was that the Institute take into consideration the mounting evidence that the Lasallian charism and vocation extend beyond the boundaries of the Brothers' communities.*

This justified Brother John's suggestion that the issue of Shared Mission should be given prominence.

## **1.2 The Report of the Brother Superior General to the Chapter**

As has already been mentioned, in preparation for the Chapter, Brother John and his Council had begun to work together in order to prepare The Report of the Brother Superior General, as the Rule required. This preparation was greatly facilitated by the fact some of the Councilors had increased their computer skills, and the Report itself was accordingly well cross-referenced with the sources for statements and citations in the Report acknowledged on the right of each page. Included with the Report was a magisterial presentation entitled *New Perspectives for Religious Education* that Brother John Johnston had given on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1993 at the Pontifical University of Salamanca as the concluding reflection in a series under the title “Searching for Alternatives in the Educational Mission of the Consecrated Life.” As the Report of the Superior General was not sent to the Institute prior to the Chapter, the delegates received it upon their arrival along with the text just referred to as well as the Conference presented to the Chapter by Father José Cristo Rey Paredes at the opening of the Chapter itself.

It came somewhat as a surprise, therefore, to some members of the General Council who had worked with Brother John on the Report (and to a number of the Chapter delegates) that Brother John indicated to the Chapter Commission that, after the presentation of the Report and the questioning from the Chapter, he wished to have the opportunity to make a *personal commentary* on the original Report. Brother John justified this in terms of the wording of the Rule that spoke of the Report of the Superior General without mention of his Council. This personal commentary, distributed

in three languages to the capitulants, was, at over 11,000 words, longer than the 'official' Report itself! Where the 'official' Report had been an objective summary showing how the Brother Superior and Council had fulfilled their mandate according to the Propositions, Recommendations and Decisions of the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter, the personal commentary was Brother John's overview of the Institute as he saw it: the five objectives already mentioned in the 1992 Pastoral Letter on Transformation: Identity and Role; our vocation; our identity in the Lasallian Family; our role in the Lasallian Family; an Institute composed exclusively of lay religious; our Apostolic Spirituality; Human and Christian Education; Conversion; the Christian school accessible to the poor; direct service of the poor; call to fidelity; ongoing formation; our experience of government; Regions; Districts; Delegations; Finance; The Generalate "Conference Center"; Generalate; Lasallian Sisters; Conclusion.

All of this was presented in an interesting fashion and gave a concise overview of the Institute. Many capitulants found it a most comprehensive "State of the Institute" address that gave them a better sense of their role as Chapter delegates. For others, however, including some of his Councilors, the length and detail of the personal commentary raised questions of various kinds. Did Brother John not agree with the official Report to which he had contributed? Was the beginning of a new Chapter an appropriate forum to re-present material already contained in the Pastoral Letters and the Institute Bulletins? Was this "a pre-election speech" in view of the elections that would have to take place during this Chapter when Brother John's mandate would end?

It so happened that some delegates to this Chapter, especially from the southern hemisphere already recognized as the major locus for the Church of the future, felt that it was very important for the future General Council of the Institute to have a stronger representation and thus a better-informed voice from Latin America. A small group, accordingly, had already contacted some Chapter delegates personally to urge them in this direction, while others went out of their way during the Chapter to make sure that single delegates from smaller sections of the Institute were solicited and made aware of this need. Brother Paul Grass, as Secretary General, noted this in his post-Chapter article in the Institute Bulletin No. 239, A CHAPTER ENDS – A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS in the following words:

*Other Brothers from Asia, Africa and Latin America made certain that the General Chapter, numerically representative of the Institute's majority numbers in the Northern Hemisphere, was constantly aware of the diverse challenges that the Institute faced in developing countries. (page 2)*

These two currents, therefore, were already present even though they did not surface immediately as the Chapter, after the initial formal ceremonies and the extremely challenging conferences of the two invited speakers, Michael Amaladoss S.J. and José Cristo Rey Paredes, established its officers and began its work with the Consultants in Commissions for the next two weeks.

### **1.3 Meeting with the Consultants**

The two-weeks meeting with the Consultants was highly successful. In his Report on the Chapter, Brother Paul Grass,

Secretary General, noted the 'new' agenda brought by the Consultants as follows:

*At the moment when Capitulants were becoming used to working in commission with Sisters, lay men and lay women and to understanding the implications of the lay vocation and its relationship to that of consecrated lay religious, they confronted less familiar but even more widespread issues. What is the relationship of the Lasallian Institute with other Christian religions and with the non-Christian religions in Africa and Asia?*

As the Commissions phase of the Chapter developed, however, some uneasiness stemming from the two issues referred to earlier began to emerge as a kind of undercurrent. In some instances, those advocating a Superior General and Council less representative of the western world, expressed the view that Brother John's seventeen years in Rome, ten as Vicar and seven as Superior, had left him out of touch with the reality of the momentous changes the Institute was undergoing, particularly in the developing world. This opinion failed to take into account Brother John's first hand experience of the Institute through his and his Councilors' systematic visitation, meetings with Regional groups both in the Region and in Rome and the improved communication systems now available. Failure to recognize or even to be aware of these factors certainly underestimated and possibly even undervalued the significant leadership role that Brother John had played since his election. The election phase of the Chapter tended to bring these matters to the surface.

#### **1.4 Brother John re-elected as Superior General**

On 4<sup>th</sup> May, the election of the Superior General took place, and in spite of those looking for another leader, Brother

John was re-elected on the first ballot. In the election of Councilors, three from the previous Council were re-elected and in a separate vote from among the elected Councilors, Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverría from Costa Rica was elected as Vicar General. As the Superior General had the right to add another Councilor if circumstances required it, Brother Marc Hofer from Switzerland was subsequently named as a seventh Councilor.

Brother John's remarks following the election show that he was aware of the undercurrents that had been present prior to his re-election. He was open – almost blunt – in recognizing that not everyone had voted for him, that he had his limitations, but was prepared to accept this second term as God's will for him and to work to the best of his ability, as the following excerpts indicate:

Brothers, I thank you for the confidence you have manifested in me... I know, however, that all of you – those who voted for me and those who did not – are aware of my faults and limitations.... I am certainly aware of the dangers that could result from being in the Central Government for such a long period. Arrogance is one of those dangers. I am impatient by temperament – and I know that I will have to be very sensitive to that tendency. Another danger is that of mental stagnation.... I continue to ask questions, to read, to listen, to participate very actively in the Union of Superiors General.... Brothers, if I have focused on negative aspects in my remarks so far, it is because I have been told that a number of you have such preoccupations – as well, of course, other concerns.... Let me say in a very positive way that I have confidence in God, confidence in myself, and confidence in the Brothers. I believe that God in his Providence has placed me

in this position.... In difficult moments – and there have been many – I have been strengthened by the marvelous support I have received from the Council, the Generalate staff, the Visitors, and the Brothers everywhere.

These words are honest and courageous. Brother John faces up to the perceptions that others had expressed in one way or another about his performance as Superior General. He refers directly to the “dangers that could result from being in the Central Government for such a long period”, his use of the word “arrogance” suggest that this is how some capitulants may have interpreted his Personal Commentary, he acknowledges his “impatience” and his need to be sensitive about his spontaneous reaction in some circumstances. The quality of Brother John’s Pastoral Letters 1986-1993 certainly showed any reader that he had not “stagnated”: his deep grasp of the Lasallian spirituality on which the new Rule was based, his attention to important developments in the Church and his close attention to the Regions of the Institute showed him to be exceptionally well-informed.

In his concluding remarks to the Chapter, Brother John stresses once again his consistent message from the Declaration that

*We Brothers of the Christian Schools are called to be men who have integrated – that is to say, made one – the three dimensions of our vocation. For this reason we have examined the quality of our lives as consecrated men, as community men, as apostolic men. We have sought to also to understand more profoundly the implications of the evolution that is taking place in the exercise of our mission.*

With regard to the two undercurrents previously mentioned, his Personal Commentary on The Report of the Brother Su-

perior General to the Chapter and the greater attention sought for Latin America, Brother John acknowledges

*“some disagreements and misunderstandings, particularly in reference to the elections. But those difficulties should be viewed objectively and relativized. The important thing is that we profit from this experience by creating at the next Chapter an electoral process which is inspired by faith and love, a process which incorporates dialogue with all person concerned. A process which is constructive and efficacious.”*

## **2. Brother John’s Conferences on Lasallian Education 1993 - 2000**

Brother John gave a number of what rightly can be called magisterial Conferences on Lasallian schools and Institutions to respond to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter’s emphasis on Shared Mission. Four of these deserve special attention because the sequence over four years shows the development of his thought and its application to different audiences.

These Conferences are the following:

1. New Perspectives on Religious Education, given at the Pontifical University of Salamanca in January 1993.
2. Lasallians without Frontiers: Our Challenge – A Challenge for Us, given at the Second European Lasallian Congress at Strasbourg, March 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup>. 1994.
3. Our Lasallian Mission in France: Today and Tomorrow, given at the Congress of the “Association La Salle”, Paris, April 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> 1997.
4. The Specificity of Lasallian Education Today given at the Lasallian Congress, Pieraeus, Greece, April 29<sup>th</sup> – May 1<sup>st</sup> 1997.

## **2.1 Salamanca**

As already noted above, the official Report to the Chapter included also a presentation that Brother John had given at the Pontifical University of Salamanca on New Perspectives for Religious Education. It is worth looking at some aspects of this presentation because we find here in a developing form what Brother John was to repeat many times in the next seven years when he spoke of Shared Mission, his clear exposition on the movement from “the Brothers’ school” to “the Lasallian school.”

He begins from his own experience as a boy at the Brothers’ school in Memphis where, “with the exception of a few specialists in sport and in music, all my teachers were Brothers.” He continues by pointing out that as a young Brother, after beginning in a school of 340 students in which eleven Brothers and one lay teacher comprised the faculty, he was transferred to a school of 1,200 boys with thirty-five Brothers and 20 lay men and lay women. Brother John describes these schools as “Brothers’ schools” and this is what they were called. In the next 20-30 years the same schools added more and more lay teachers but the model was still that of ‘the Brothers school’ in which others were seen as collaborators with the Brothers. Brother John referred to this model as ‘triangular’ as fewer Brothers were still seen as responsible for a school where the majority of teachers – the base of the ‘triangle’ – were lay men and women. The Declaration had spoken positively of the role of lay teachers, but the new Rule was much more insistent:

*The Brothers’ community is ever mindful that its apostolic activity takes place within an educational community in which all the functions, including positions of responsibility, are shared.” (Rule 17a)*

This new understanding is made explicit in the following words:

*“The Brothers make known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition. The Brothers offer to those who desire it a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific apostolic commitment.” (Rule 17c)*

*Brother John’s text goes on to say that “Both the Brothers and their lay colleagues have found it helpful to express this dramatic change in terms of a transition from ‘Brothers’ schools’ to ‘Lasallian schools’ ... a school animated by a Lasallian educational community of faith, of which the Brothers form a part.”*

Brother John does not hesitate to indicate his own initial reluctance about this seemingly inevitable development when he says that

*What is implied in our new Rule is a new manner of understanding our role as Brothers, that is to say, the manner in which we exercise our ministry. Fifteen years ago I viewed this movement with great skepticism. I feared that we were trying to impose our spirituality and pedagogy on the laity, and I found that position to be very repugnant.*

Now, embracing what the new Rule first referred to as Shared Mission (NO. 17), Brother John admits,

*We are only beginning to understand the implications and the possibilities inherent in this change of model.*

## **2.2 Strasbourg Address Lasallian without Frontiers**

This address took place while the “new” European Community was discussing the abolition of border crossings and cus-

tom posts. Brother John exploits this idea of no 'barriers' in showing that in the 18 countries represented at this Congress, Lasallian education already crosses countries, languages and cultures. His emphasis is that this would not be possible for the Brothers alone: that already, the Lasallian mission is indeed a Shared Mission. Across the wide range of Lasallian institutions, there is a sense of unity because of certain basic principles. Brother John's experience of Lasallian institutions in over 80 countries has shown him that the pupils, who come from all the major religious groupings in the world have their differences, but, in his opinion, they are essentially the same in their expectations that they can build a better world without conflicts.

Brother John details seven characteristics of Lasallian institutions:

- I. Respect for each student as a unique person. (Brother John details his own experience of growing up in a southern state of USA where there was unjust racial discrimination). A challenge to live multiculturalism through *service*.
- II. A school that is a genuine community, made up of ALL who work in it.
- III. A school of quality, of "human and Christian education", of commitment to values, faith and truth.
- IV. A school that is Christian but open to what he sees as six forms of dialogue
  - Brotherly/Sisterly relationships;
  - Promotion of a human education as a form of Gospel witness;
  - A school that promotes justice;

- A school that prays and encourages different religious expressions among the young;
  - the informal dialogue that shows our faith but respects that of the other;
  - a school that proclaims the Gospel as its basis.
- V. A school in solidarity with the poor that makes our institutions accessible to the poor.
- VI. A school whose ‘zealous’ teachers are men and women devoted to what they teach.
- VII. Schools that are organized around the remarkable and inspiring story of John Baptist de La Salle.

It is significant that, although this Strasbourg Address obviously builds on certain ideas about Shared Mission expressed in the Salamanca conference, Brother John’s thought is now much more attuned to the reality and the diversity of the European Lasallian institutions represented at this Congress.

### ***2.3 Our Lasallian Mission in France : Today and Tomorrow***

In this address to the “Association La Salle”, representing the legal person of the Institute in France, Brother John offers the strongest text of all his writings, on the inevitable movement from Brothers’ Schools to Lasallian Schools. He makes use again of the “triangle” model of the Brothers’ school, used in the Salamanca conference, to state that the Lasallian school needs to be considered as a circle. What he now offers, however, is a vision of an inevitable future in which there are five different kinds of circle:

- 1) A community of Brothers with a Brother as head/principal and a large number of lay teachers;
- 2) A community of Brothers involved in the school where the head/principal is a lay man or lay woman;
- 3) A community of Brothers where no Brothers are directly involved in the school which has a lay head/principal;
- 4) A community of Brothers with no formal activity in the school but with some Brothers Volunteering, which has a lay person as head/principal;
- 5) This is a very different “circle” because there is no Brothers’ community but the school is still linked to the Lasallian network.

Brother John pointed out that although circle 5 may not yet exist, it is most likely to do so and asked whether it would be “feasible or desirable”?

In the ensuing discussion the positive and negative aspects of each circle were examined and the question that remained open was HOW any of these “circles” could be maintained as vibrant sections of the Lasallian network.

This was a difficult conference but it is a good example of Brother John’s ability to envisage a different future and his willingness to have the question opened for discussion.

## ***2.4 Greece: The Specificity of Lasallian Education Today***

The content of this presentation is very much the same as that offered to the Association La Salle in France with some significant differences. Brother John takes into account that

a large number of the students in the Lasallian schools in Greece belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. A particular emphasis, therefore, is given to the importance of both ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, an issue highlighted in the General Council's own document, The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education.

### **3. Circulars and Publications**

Brother John's leadership of his Council meant that he was actively involved in all the official Circulars and other publications between 1993 and 2000. With the exception of some Circulars under his name reporting the deaths of former Assistants and procedures for admission to vows, he was actively involved in the preparation and final form of the following key documents:

#### ***3.1 June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1993 Circular No. 435 The 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter***

This official publication was intended to share the event of the Chapter itself, its Recommendations and Propositions with the Institute. It includes important summary texts from the work of the Chapter Commissions. The section includes a Message of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter to the Brothers and a message about the shared mission to the worldwide Lasallian Family. The Circular emphasized that the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter is part of a continuing process, an Institute movement, which has gradually developed since the 1950's that includes Shared Mission. The Circular also spoke to awakening and accompanying the vocation of the Brother today and Brothers in later years.

### **3.2 December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1993. Circular No. 437 "Towards the Year 2000"**

*In this Circular we offer you a general view of the ways in which Brother Superior and the General Council are responding to the various tasks which the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter mandated to them.*

#### *1. Pastoral Visits by Brother Superior and Councilors*

As the difficulties of completing two pastoral visits had been highlighted in the Report to the Chapter, the following decision was taken:

*Since the General Chapter of 1976 suppressed the office of Assistant, the Government of the Institute has been confided to the Brother Superior, assisted by an elected group of Councilors. Two successive General Councils, 1976-1986 and 1986-1993 maintained the tradition of two official pastoral visits between successive General Chapters. Since the Report of the Superior General to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter noted the difficulty experienced by the Councilors in maintaining a second pastoral visit, along with presence for Regional assemblies, retreats, District Chapters, Conference of Visitors etc. without prejudicing its presence in Rome as a Council "around the Superior", our interpretation of the Chapter's discussion of this has led us to decide that there will be no second official pastoral visit made to each Region."*

#### *2. Relations of Councilors with Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts, Delegations*

#### *3. Commissions established by the General Council*

#### *4. Modification of some articles of the Rule*

#### *5. The Annual Report*

### **3.3 October 1998. Circular No. 443 “Reflection on the Missionary Policy of the Institute”**

As can be found in many of the Pastoral Letters, Brother John worked very hard to develop a deep sense of Solidarity and Mutual Support in the Institute so that resources, personnel and finance, would be available to sectors in need. The formation centers at Abidjan (Ivory Coast) for West Africa, and the Tangaza Scholasticate at Nairobi were both created under Brother John’s leadership.

This Circular format was the result of a long period of study by the Commission for Missionary Affairs under the presidency of Brother Dominique Samné, Councilor, who died in his native Burkina Faso on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1998. The Circular is dedicated to him. As the following Table of Contents indicates, this was the Council’s response to a large number of questions that had been asked in the Institute over a long period of time.

*Preamble: “By policy we understand the fundamental options, aims and ideals deliberately pursued by the Institute, in keeping with its charism to serve young people, and especially those who are deprived, by providing them with education.”*

These options, aims and ideals can be summarized in a few guiding principles: to provide a response

- To the needs of the universal Church;
- To the needs of specific Churches;
- To the need for the human and Christian education in certain social environments;
- And to insert and consolidate the local Institute in sectors which are small or developing and which have not

yet achieved sufficient self-sufficiency in personnel and finances.

Chapter 1: The present-day context of the mission

Chapter 2: The Church's missionary activity

Chapter 3: The participation of our Institute in the Church's missionary activity

Chapter 4: The inculturation of the Institute

Chapter 5: The Institute adopts structures and means for the implementation of its missionary policy

- 1) The organization of missionary policy and Regions. The ideal proposed. What has been achieved?
- 2) The Center of the Institute promotes the implementation of the missionary policy. The Center of the Institute promotes the adoption of missionary projects. The 100 PLUS Mission.
- 3) The Centre oversees the fraternal sharing of financial resources. The Sharing Fund. The Special Lasallian Formation Fund. Twinning schemes. SECOLI.

### **3.4 1997. "The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian education"**

This was one of the most important documents produced by Brother John and his Council but it never had an official number as a Circular.

One of the Recommendations from the General Chapter (5.14, page 49) reads:

*The General Chapter strongly recommends to Brother Superior and his Council the drawing up and publication of a study (Circular) on*

*the shared mission which contains coherent teaching, guidelines and pastoral orientations.*

Completing this task was entrusted to the Commission on Shared Mission comprising four Councilors (of different nationalities) and the Secretary for the Educational Mission. Progress was slow but eventually the overall schema drawn up by one of the Councilors was accepted and work on the document began.

A major difficulty in the group was finding common accord on what should be written about interreligious dialogue. Even though Brother John had indicated some principles of interreligious dialogue in his Strasbourg address of March 1984, only two of the Councilors had any experience of this so the document was stalled at this point.

The second Colloquium in Colombo, Sri Lanka on the topic of Globalization in 1995 provided the opportunity to all the members of the Council to listen to speakers from different religious traditions – Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity - and to experience as well, not only some aspects of worship and prayer in these different traditions, but also the multi-religious composition of the people who worked with the local Brothers in a slum project. Once this obstacle on interreligious dialogue had been overcome, the text was soon completed.

The document was ready for publication in 1996 when it was decided to offer different cultural parts of the Institute to produce their printed version of the document in color in a way that made it more obviously attractive to them. This was done so that there were five different versions in English (Great Britain and Ireland, USA, Australia, Malaysia, Philippines), Spanish, Catalan, Basque, French, Italian, and Portu-

guess. Although there were recommendations about an attractive format in color, the quality of these productions differed considerably.

#### **4. Institute Bulletins 1993-2000**

The Institute Bulletins during Brother John's second term as Superior General continued the importance he had given them in his first term. Some indication of the content of each Bulletin reinforces his concern in sharing information and the encouraging of reciprocal communication that was so successful after 1986.

Immediately following the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter, Institute Bulletin No. 239 in July 1993, gave a complete account in seven chapters of the Conferences, Homilies, Chronicle, Consultants, Message of the Consultants to the Chapter, details of the Elections, the audience with Pope John Paul II, a Message from the Chapter to the Brothers, a Message to the worldwide Lasallian Family and the concluding remarks of Brother John Johnston.

##### **4.1 No. 240-1994 *The Institute in Asia and in Oceania***

This Bulletin continued the series on each of the Regions of the Institute.

##### **4.2 No. 241-1995 *Three Manifestations of the Charism of De La Salle***

Articles: The history and present situation of the Union of Catechists of Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate; the Lasallian Guadalupanas Sisters; the Lasallian Sisters of Vietnam.

#### **4.3 No. 242-1996 Institute Experiences of Shared Mission**

Articles: As one of the decisions of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter was to prepare a questionnaire under the title of Shared Mission which invited every sector of the Institute to reply and indicate what it was doing, this Bulletin offers the most comprehensive view of what was taking place in the Institute.

#### **4.4 No. 243-1997 The Lasallian Christian School and its Presence among Other Religions**

Articles: Seven articles describe different situations in Asia, four in Africa, three in the Middle East, and in cities in France, New York and Belgium.

#### **4.5 No. 244-1998 Faithful even to Giving One's Life Lasallian Martyrology**

This Bulletin was Inspired by the list of modern-day martyrs published by the Vatican. I included articles on martyred Brothers.

#### **4.6 No. 245-1999 Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and Education Today**

Articles: In response to Proposition 2 of the General Chapter, that *"The General Chapter asks the Brother Superior and his Council to name a group of experts in the field of education who will serve as observers of the broad educational concerns, Brothers Nicolas Capelle, Anton de Roeper, Herman Lombaerts and José María Martínez organized the following **Five Colloquia**:*

– Rome 1994 *The Family*.

- Sri Lanka 1995 *Globalization in a Differentiated World and Lasallian Education.*
- Mexico 1996 *The Megalopolis as a Social Phenomenon and Lasallian Education.*
- Barcelona 1997 *How New Information Technology (NTIC) challenges the Lasallian School*
- Rome 1998 *Communicating the Faith Today Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue”*

The Bulletin is remarkable in assembling all the documentation and conferences given in the course of these Colloquia.

#### **4.7 No. 246-2000 The 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter**

This Bulletin continues the pattern set by Bulletin No. 229 in publishing a complete issue on the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter. Brother John’s words of welcome give special attention to De La Salle’s emphasis on “union as a precious gem”, reminding the capitulants that

*As capitulants we recognize, acknowledge, and accept responsibility, as the Rule says, “for the entire body of the Institute.” (Rule, 118)*

In the words that Brother John had been asked to offer for the Day of Recollection, he draws out the meaning of Blain’s account of the way in which the teachers of 1686 chose to call themselves “Brothers”, recalling that “the passage which is the object of our meditation this morning calls to mind our Rule, which describes the Brothers as men united in one spirit, brothers among themselves, brothers to the adults with whom they are in contact, older brothers to the young people confided to their care, brothers to all.”

Brother John gives this foundation concept a present tense

in an application of a text of Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata*:

*The passage reminds us also of Pope John Paul II's strong affirmation of the vocation of the Brother. The term "brother", he says, suggests a rich spirituality: a spirituality of living as brothers of Jesus Christ, brothers of one another, brothers to everyone, especially the lowliest, the neediest. It is a spirituality that invites us to dedicate ourselves to greater brotherhood in the Church. Furthermore, he writes, 'as they live their vocation, Brothers proclaim to all the Lord's words, You are all brothers and sisters.'" (Matthew 23:8, Vita Consecrata, 60)*

As Brother John's last official words as Superior General, this reflection and its application to the present became an important 'catalyst' in helping the capitulants focus on making the necessary decisions "that will help our Brothers, our partners, and our associates to live today our founding story."

## **5. The Brother's 'Lay' Vocation**

If there was one issue which increasingly occupied Brother John's mind in his second term as Superior General it was the importance of the Brother's 'lay' vocation. His perception was certainly 'sharpened' by the role he played the 1994 Synod on Consecrated life as well as by the parts played by Brothers Pablo Basterrechea in his work on the Brother's vocation and Gerard Rummery through his work in the preparation of the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

The question of some Brothers being ordained for pastoral work in their schools or for "the Eucharistic service of their community" had surfaced in the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council and

been rejected. It had re-appeared again with less encouragement in the 1976 Chapter but had once again been rejected as inconsistent with the initial vision of the Founder, especially the uncompromising words of the 1717 Rule, “they shall not be priests not aspire to the ecclesiastical state.”

Brother John’s concern was not with the priesthood itself (his youngest brother Michael was a priest) but rather, with the way in which the Brother’s vocation was often seen, particularly in some Church documents in preparation for the 1994 Synod on the Consecrated Life, through a clerical perspective.

It has not been unusual to hear comments in recent years that the emphasis of Vatican II on the universal call to holiness, as well as its position that religious life belongs not to the hierarchical structure of the Church but to the charismatic structure of the Church, has contributed unwittingly to the confusion concerning the meaning and importance of religious life. ... But not everyone accepts that orientation... It is possible, therefore, to recognize and identify three “categories” in the Church: laity, ordained, ministers, consecrated persons. (Pastoral Letter 1995: p. 28)

Brother John points out that “the Lineamenta (19b, 21) in preparation for the Synod on Consecrated Life devoted a page and a half to the topic of Brothers, declaring that

*“the consecrated life of brothers is today the most visible form of consecration in the variety of its charisms... Oftentimes the character of the lay consecrated life for men is not clearly perceived, given that many of the faithful think that it should be joined to the priesthood, while in fact it represents consecration in its utter simplicity.”*

Brother John's comment is clear:

*I think it fair to say that many religious brothers appreciated this surprising coverage and welcomed the affirmation and encouragement. To some other brothers, however, it seemed that the passages imply that the brother's vocation appears so strange that it requires special treatment to explain and justify it... How does one justify the statement: "The consecrated life of brothers is today the most visible form of consecrated life... it represents consecration in its utter simplicity... Of the 82.2% of consecrated persons who are not priests, only 9.7% are brothers. In what way do brothers – more than others – manifest consecration in its "most visible form"? In what way do brothers – any more than sisters – represent "consecration in its utter simplicity. ...But this line of reasoning is "curious" at best, "clerical at worst." Underlying it, it seems to me, is an "uncomfortable" assumption that priesthood does somehow "complete" or perhaps "perfect" a priestless consecrated life and that the authors are struggling with the inconsistency of their position." (ibid pp. 32-35)*

Finally, Brother John asserts in no uncertain terms his understanding of the Brother's vocation as "complete":

*Several years ago I was at first amused, then irritated, during the homily of a well-meaning Church official who praised the brothers for having "sacrificed" the priesthood in order to give themselves "full-time" to the service of youth. I have never sacrificed the priesthood! I chose to become a Brother because I felt a much stronger attraction to becoming a brother than to becoming a priest – an attraction that was central to my discernment that God was calling me to become a Brother... I never hear people asking whether the consecrated life of sisters is "incomplete" because it lacks the priesthood ... our consecrated life is 100% complete. (ibid)*

Finally, Brother John sees this greater accent on the laity in relation to the almost spontaneous movement of the Institute to “Shared Mission”:

*John Paul II has remarked that the participation of the laity is in the process of changing ecclesial life (Redemptionis missio, 2). The most striking difference between the experimental Rule of 1967 and its final version in 1986 is the introduction of a section called “shared mission.” (Pastoral Letter 1996, p. 15-16)*

## **6. Pastoral Letters 1994 – 2000**

This overview of Brother John’s Pastoral Letters in his second term as Superior General continues the already noted emphases of the previous seven years. After a Pauline salutation that varies according to the topic, each Letter notes some important items referring to the life of the Institute before addressing the chosen theme.

### ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994 Living Authentically in Christ Jesus***

References are to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter; the Beatification of the Martyrs of Almería as “witnesses to Jesus Christ”; the Institute’s interest in the Synod on Africa; the forthcoming Synod on Consecrated Life following the successful Congress on the same topic organized by the Union of Superiors General; the solidarity of the African Region in providing Brothers to opening communities in Congo and the contribution of the Brazilian Districts for their opening in Mozambique. The Letter itself comprises six sections,

- Closing the Gap between theory and practice in our living as Brothers;
- Charism in Church documents and in the Lasallian tradition;

- In Christ, Paul’s “for me, to live is Christ;
- Ambassadors and Ministers of Jesus Christ;
- Our specific role in Shared Mission;
- Community as consecrated men in apostolic communities.

### ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995 Our Charism in the Light of the Synod: Some Reflections***

Brother John had previously been an auditor at a Synod but this time he was named as one of the two Assistants to the Special Secretary, his close friend Superior General Marcello Zago OMI, working in close conjunction with the Special Secretary, Cardinal Basil Hume OSB, Archbishop of Westminster. As such, Brother John not only heard all the interventions made in the Assembly during the plenary sessions but was actively involved in the ‘processing’ of these in the development of the discussion groups in the later part of the Synod. The particular emphasis of the second part of the Letter comes under the title *Our Charism*, about which Brother John says,

*“I intend now to ‘meditate’ more directly on our own charism in the light of opinions expressed and orientations adopted by the synod participants. I have decided to take as my point of departure a particularly precious and pertinent text of St. De La Salle: Meditation 201, the ninth of his Meditations for the Time of Retreat”.*

This prolonged reflection takes into account most aspects of the Brother’s life but gives a particular emphasis to the new challenge to the Brother and his identity through his role in Shared Mission.

### **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1996. The Year of Prayer Postscript**

The focus of the letter as the sub-title indicates is Brother John's reflection on the implementation of the General Chapter's decision that 1995 was to be *The Year of Prayer*. The provision of materials for this special year had been one of the priorities of the General Council and there had been many requests for special sessions and retreats to be run by the Councilors. This is a particularly rich text because of the way Brother John links the broad topic of prayer to the Rule and thus to all the ways in which the Brother is at prayer and praying in all the actions of each day.

### **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1997. Being Brothers Today: The Enduring Challenge of the Declaration**

As this New Year marked a period of thirty years since the Declaration, Brother John introduces this, his longest Letter to this point, by referring by a challenging citation from this document that concludes with these words:

*It is up to each Brother in the presence of God to start out along the path of spiritual conversion and determine to have a personal share in the communal work of adapted renewal. This is the price to be paid if the Institute is to ward off the threat of stagnation and live again in youth and vigor. (53.2)*

After referring to various initiatives taking place to solve the "grave situation in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa" and inviting the Brothers to be "active and effective apostles of unity and peace", Brother John explains his use of the title, *Being Brothers Today*, in the following way:

*This letter is about Being Brothers today. Each word in the title is important. By employing the gerund "being", I am trying to com-*

*municate a sense of life, of creativity, of dynamism ... I use the word "today" as a reminder that yesterday is yesterday and that tomorrow is tomorrow: neither yesterday nor tomorrow exists. There is only TODAY. (page 9)*

Brother John next points out some of the emphases of the post-Synod document *Vita Consecrata*, especially concerning the way in which persons can experience a call and allow themselves to be "captivated" by it "in the depths of their heart" so that they are "at home" in their vocation. (VC, 104). It is this sense of being Brother Today that Brother John elaborates by his development of his sub-title, the enduring challenge of the Declaration. This is not simply a return to his presentation of 1976, but rather a re-reading of the Declaration in the light of *Vita Consecrata* and as such, it takes up the directions of the new Rule after the Chapter of 1986, and the present challenge to Conversion uttered by the Capitulants of 1993. It would be difficult to find a more comprehensive presentation of a perennial Lasallian spirituality to be lived out in the then contemporary world of 1997. Perhaps it is one of the best examples of Brother John's remarkable ability to be faithful to the past while most relevant to the continuing challenges of today.

### ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998. Look to the Future: Build Communities today that are Innovative, Creative and Holy***

Brother John takes the challenging words of Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* (110), "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit

is sending you in order to do even greater things,” as the theme for this Letter.

He begins by referring to the Synod on America in which he was named an observer, the International Congress of Young Religious organized by the Union of Superiors General of Women and of Men, the Lasallian Assembly of Young Religious in the Asia-Pacific Region, and gives a progress report on the Five Colloquia developed from the decision of the General Chapter.

The subsequent sections are:

- Look to the Future as Men of Hope;
- Consecrated men living your dedication to the full;
- The Community Life of the Brothers;
- Apostolic Communities that are innovative and Creative;
- Pastoral ministry of vocations: invite at least one young man!

It is interesting to find Brother John returning to his longtime favorite *Fiddler on the Roof* as a “point of departure for reflection on the meaning of belonging to a particular society of people and, specifically, to the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.” We have met this citation in various expressions in Brother John’s writings, but this time we have the exact quotation:

*Because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.*

Brother John applies this idea to the importance of the Institute’s own traditions in Rule 47, “an inspired decision”:

*John Baptist de La Salle was led to found a community of men who were enlightened by God to have a share in his plan of salvation...*

*Even today, each of the Brothers' communities finds in this historical event a fundamental source of inspiration.*

As the Letter develops, Brother John touches many themes he has previously treated, as can be seen from the above bullet points. What is striking about a re-reading of these points is their breadth: Brother John shows remarkable ability in giving them present and continuing relevance by his reference to contemporary thinking and events.

### ***January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999. The Defense of Children, the Reign of God and the Lasallian Mission***

“My intention”, Brother John announces, “is to situate the defense of children squarely in the context of our faith and of our Lasallian heritage and mission. ... My purpose is not to pose as an expert. It is to promote reflection, dialogue, and, I hope, effective action.” (page 11). What follows in this letter is a most comprehensive enumeration of, and comment on, so many ways in which children are being exploited. The overall tone is objective but the deep concern, even anguish, of the writer is evident in so many ways.

Brother John states the Thesis of this letter: “The thesis of this pastoral letter is that the situation of poor children in today’s world is an unspeakable scandal and that out Lasallian charism invites us to make solidarity with neglected, abandoned, marginalized and exploited children a particular focus for our mission.” (pp. 41-42)

- Brother John’s sequence of ideas is impressive. Violating the rights of children; abortion; poverty; street children; sexual abuse; physical, mental disabilities; illiteracy; child labor; children and armed conflicts; youth violence; youth

- offenses; denying children their childhood, Defending the rights of children: what the Convention requires; “Deeply moved by poor and abandoned children”;
- In accord with what the Reign of God requires: what the Reign of God means; the Reign of God and the Lasallian Mission;
  - The Defense of Children: A new focus for Lasallian Mission; 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter; thesis of this letter; solidarity with poor children; CIL 1999-2000; how can we live solidarity with children and poor youth today; Kids Helpline, Australia; International Catholic Child Bureau BICE.

### **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 The Challenge: Live Today our Founding Story**

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this last Pastoral Letter is that it re-presents in many ways Brother John’s starting point, the conference given at the 1976 General Chapter which precipitated him into the next 24 years of his life in Rome as Vicar General and Superior General. He writes of his initial difficulty in addressing the topic The Challenge of St. John Baptist de La Salle to the Brothers Today:

*I confess that I was unable to find a way to speak of the challenge. I decided to speak about eight sub-challenges. Today, twenty-four years later, I return to my topic. This time, however, I have found what I think is a valid way to express the challenge of John Baptist de La Salle for today: Live Today our Founding Story. (p. 9)*

And what is this valid way? We are not surprised to find Brother John choosing the chapter of the Declaration called Fidelity to the Founder. Brother John sees this trust confided to us not as individuals, but to the Institute, the community

of persons who constitute it. To do this, requires us to tell again and again, our story.

That is precisely what this Letter becomes because Brother John, anticipating the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter, sees that this Chapter “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”, must help the Institute to live today our founding story.

In many ways this is a re-presentation of all the important ideas that Brother John has offered through the 14 Pastoral Letters from 1987 – 2000. But it is neither a litany nor a listing. Each idea has both its historical and its contemporary context, so that the story is familiar but still relevant and in the present tense.

Brother Gerard Rummery, after reading Brother John’s text and hearing him wonder whether it would be read “as a re-hash of what I’ve said before”, recalls reminding him of some lines from T.S. Eliot’s fourth quartet, *The Dry Salvages*:

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time*

Brother John did indeed come to “know the place for the first time” but it was because of his constant searching to find better ways of sharing this important vision that we can appreciate the increasing spiritual and theological depth of his Lasallian knowledge, as well as the expanding horizons opening up before him through his travels and his meeting with like-minded people in the Union of Superiors General. He was discovering one of the most basic principles of aesthetics: it is not so much novelty that attracts us, but rather, deepening the familiar.

## **6.1 A General Comment on the Pastoral Letters 1993-2000**

There is no doubt that Brother John regarded his Pastoral Letters as one of the most personal forms of communication that he had with the Brothers of the Institute. He also “grew” into this form of communication in that the initial tone of the letters was close to the Brother Superior addressing the Brothers, whereas the later letters become more and more like Brother John addressing his Brothers, or, as has been suggested, “thinking along with his Brothers.” The tone is much more personal and Brother John makes no attempt to be simply objective and hide his enthusiasms!

As December was usually one of the months when all the Councilors were in Rome, there was always a pre-Christmas recollection of the Council during Advent and the Council meetings usually finished in the week before Christmas. This was “quiet time” for Brother John and it becomes obvious that the letters were written out of his personal reflection and meditation. Any analysis shows that the last four letters (1997 – 2000) become longer and there is much more content. Each topic, or each division within a topic, can usually stand alone as regards its content and argument, because Brother John seems to want to offer as many avenues as he thought important for the personal reflection of the reader. Even with abundant headings and sub-headings, the overall schema sometimes appears forced. This, however, may not be very important in itself because, as many Prayer services that use excerpts from the Pastoral Letters clearly show, there are often individual sections of only one or two paragraphs that profoundly challenge the reader.

It is not accidental that Brother John wanted his Letters to appear in a format that enabled them to be carried in a pocket or inserted within the pages of a book. Each Brother of the Institute could receive his personal copy. Reading, reflecting and meditation on the content was an opportunity for each Brother to share Brother John's most profound and personal 'teaching' from the Lasallian heritage he wished to shared with all his Brothers.

## **7. Two important contributions of Brother John**

To conclude this account of Brother John's years of leadership there are two important matters that need at least to be mentioned to take account of the extraordinary contribution that Brother John made to the wider Church in his 24 years in Rome:

1. his work with the Union of Superiors General (USG) and
2. his interest and support for the San Egidio Community.

### ***7.1 Brother John and the Union of Superiors General (USG) and (UISG)***

Many people who knew something of the responsibilities that Brother John carried as Superior General of a world-wide Institute did not always understand why he devoted so much time and energy to his involvement in the Union of Superiors General (USG) in Rome. Brother John's extraordinary dedication needs to be understood from the following perspective.

In his Report to the 1976 General Chapter, Brother Charles Henry, (Superior General 1966-1976), reported that he, in

his position as Superior, had continued the membership of the institute with the Union of Superiors General of Men (USG). He detailed his reasons for doing so:

*I have tried to read aright the signs of these times as far as the task of Superior General is concerned... A sign that I think I have read aright is the relatively new role of the Superior General as it has taken place in Rome. The Most Honored Brother Nicet saw the sign during the years of his generalate, and that was why he joined the Roman Union of Superiors General, accepted a post of special importance in the Union, and entered into close contact with his fellow Superiors General. I have profited from his initiative and I have tried to grow with the Union, to serve on its various committees, to take an active part in its seminars and study weeks, to represent the Teaching Brothers in the administrative body of the Union. It brought me into the official Vatican organs of service, the Sacred Congregation of Religious, of Evangelization, of Catholic Education... No longer is it a novelty to see a Brother in these pontifical bodies or even in the Synod of bishops: the Cardinals and Bishops who are the traditional members of these Curial bodies take it for granted that a Brother has a place therein, that the Brothers have something to contribute to them... I trust this Chapter will recognize this as one of the roles proper to the Superior General and give mandate in this sense to the Brother they will elect as the 24<sup>th</sup> Superior of our Institute.*

When Brother Charles mentioned the readiness of the Curial Congregations to recognize the role of the Brothers' congregations in the Church, he was acknowledging that the 'visibility' of the Brothers in the USG was an important witness to the whole Church and a reminder of the vocation of the lay religious in the clerically dominated Curial congregations.

Following the 1976 Chapter, Brother Pablo Basterrechea not only continued the relationship of the Institute with the USG but strengthened it during his ten years as Superior, and following his retirement, returned to Rome by invitation from the USG to act for four years as the General Secretary of the Union. The presence of Brothers in the USG changed a number of the ways things had previously been done. For example, in one of the meetings where five or six Superiors General of Brothers' congregations were present at the opening celebration of Eucharist, they were the only ones in the nave of the chapel while all the priests concelebrated. This was so obviously unsuitable as a procedure that it was never repeated, the celebrants thereafter being one or three at the most.

Brother John continued this strong relationship and over his fourteen years as Superior General, served three 3-year terms as Vice-President. Like his three predecessors as Superior General, Brother John saw the USG not as a kind of "pressure group" but as an important voice for religious life in its many forms working actively with the Curial congregations for the Church. Brother John was convinced that it was important for the Brothers' congregations, as distinct from the role of 'brothers' in clerical congregations, to have a public profile and a voice in matters that touched them as vowed lay religious. His activity and his efficiency in this regard were of great importance. All the members of the USG were members of international congregations who had many commitments outside Rome, but Brother John managed to balance up his many other commitments by his efficiency in anything he undertook on behalf of the USG. Father Anthony McSweeney S.S.S., the retiring President when John

was Vice-President wrote in a letter to the USG on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1993 as follows:

*As Vice-President, John Johnston was an invaluable source of unflaggingly loyal support and encouragement, especially for his intelligence and good judgment as well as his friendship; he was remarkably good, too, at keeping me regularly informed (much better than I was able to do in return).*

Brother Joseph Hendron comments on Brother John's contribution to the USG and the UISG (Council of Men and Women Superiors General):

*He was highly regarded among Superiors General, male and female, in Rome. He was on three occasions vice-president of the men's section; at the time the presidency was reserved to clerics. It has to be said that many of the other Superiors were not happy with this. John would have had a handsome majority vote from clerics and non-clerics alike, for president. But it was never an issue with him personally, although at all times and in all places he was immensely proud of his vocation of 'Brother'; that was not to be compromised for any advancement or privilege. He made no secret of that.*

Indeed, Brother John's contribution was such that in the 1997 General Meeting, he received so much support in the preliminary "straw" vote, that it seemed clear he would be elected as President. In between the morning and afternoon session when the final vote was to be taken, however, it seems that one of the members spread the idea that the Union would not have the same influence with the Curial Congregations if the incoming President was not a priest.

Brother John was personally devastated by this playing of the "clerical" card. Brother Gerard Rummery recalls Brother

John a few days later showing him a number of personal letters written to him by priests who were fellow-members of the USG, one of which said in effect, “I thought “clericalism” was something in the past, but I was genuinely ashamed of the way in which your election was prevented by those who never raised the issue of a non-cleric being President during the open forum beforehand.” While Brother John certainly felt this slight personally, he was probably also upset that the opportunity had been missed for having a President who was a lay religious, not a cleric. This came about eventually during Brother Alvaro’s service in the USG as Vice-President when the then President not continuing as Superior General of his congregation, Brother Alvaro, under the rules of the USG, succeeded him as President and was re-elected subsequently in his own right.

When Father Timothy Radcliff O.P., former Master-General of the Dominicans, was informed of Brother John’s illness and death, he remarked that “while Brother John Johnston was in Rome, he was a beacon of light for the Church.”

## ***7.2 Brother John and the San Egidio Community***

During his period as Vicar General, Brother John came to know and admire the work of the San Egidio Community, founded in Rome in 1968 by a 20 year old student, Andrea Riccardi and a group of High School students. He attended one of their evening prayers in the ancient San Egidio church in the Trastevere. Here was a lay movement in which men and women devoted time each week to helping the poor in various ways and met, as best they could, for evening prayer around 9.00 pm.

As the movement spread, became stronger and more international, it was successful in finally negotiating a peace deal between warring factions in Mozambique after nearly 30 years of conflict. On a number of occasions, members of the San Egidio Community presented in SEDOS meetings or in official meetings of the USG.

Brother John, through his personal friendship with one of the members, Claudio Betti, on a number of occasions offered the use of buildings, chapel and grounds of the Casa Generalizia for one-day retreats for young people, organized and run by San Egidio. During some of the CIL sessions it became possible for volunteers from the CIL group to take the Wednesday evening roster for serving meals to the poor and homeless.

Brother John was particularly interested in this 'model' of lay leadership which he saw as prophetic for the Church of the future, perhaps even mirroring some aspects of the development of Shared Mission by the Institute.

## **8. Brother Alvaro's Tribute to Brother John**

In his first words to the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter following his election as Superior General, Brother Alvaro spoke of his predecessor as follows:

*I think I do not have to convince anyone in affirming that the person, the example and the animation of the Institute that Brother John has accomplished, has had great transcendency and has profoundly marked the Institute over these past two decades. I would like to feel that I am the spokesman of all of you in thanking him, as I was at the inauguration of the oil portrait that today adorns our Casa Generalizia, for his energetic and pro-active spirit, his vision*

*for the future, the quality of his witness and his reflections, his tenacious work, his rectitude, his profound love of and interest in, each Brother and each one of the Regions of the Institute. We all have admired his extraordinary memory and ability to know the names and traits of thousands of Brothers. We have seen his concern for the defense of the Rights of Children, his up-to-the-minute attention to situations of injustice in the world, of wars, of catastrophes, of human problems... We have witnessed his restlessness to do something about them and to urge us, as Institute, to respond as well to these situations. And finally, we know of his openness to lay persons, the results of which we gathered as a harvest in this Chapter with the challenging theme of Association for the educational service of the poor. I believe that I have grasped, as well, the feeling of all of you that the Lasallian charism has truly been in very good hands.*

*Besides the participation of Brother John in the Union of Superiors General, his nine years as Vice-President and his participation in three Synods have opened up the Institute more to the dimensions of Church. We give thanks to God for this, and we are grateful to you, Brother John, with our whole heart asking God to continue to fill you with his blessings, secure in the knowledge that you will continue to make valuable contributions to our Institute. (Bulletin 246 – 2000, p. 60).*

## ***Section Four***

### **Brother John Johnston 2000 – 2007**

#### ***Return to the USA***

Following the conclusion of the Chapter, Brother John, after completing the work needed to vacate Rome after 24 years residence, returned to the United States. For one year he became a member of the De La Salle Community, Chicago, Brother John had chosen this community because he wished to spend a sabbatical year, attending some courses that interested him at Chicago theological union, while entering as fully as possible into the life of the community that served the school. He became an enthusiastic supporter of the school football, baseball and basketball teams and came to know the players by name. He entered with his customary enthusiasm into all the activities and meetings that characterized a working community, though it was natural that after his 24 years in Rome where everything had been done for him – laundry, meals, personal secretary, car etc. – he had to make daily adjustments as he was now in a small community. He confessed to being a “slow learner” when community members often had to prepare their own meals at weekends because he had missed all these years when communities had become much more self-reliant. He was a willing learner but it was inevitable that he was often ‘outside’ much of the ordinary table conversation with its references to things that had taken place during his long absence. Moreover, since the meal table was usually the one place where the Brothers met informally during the day, the conversation was usually

light-hearted and informal rather than serious. This was such a change after what he had been accustomed to for so many years that Brother John may sometimes have felt that many of the things that had been his chief concerns about the life of the Institute, seemed to have made little impact on the lives of some of the Brothers with whom he was living.

Moving from his position at the head of the Institute, and putting aside the international role he had played in the Union of Superiors General, including his nine years as Vice-President, was not an easy transition for Brother John. It took some time for adjustment but there were many subtleties in this adjustment. For example, accustomed as Brother John had been for some 24 years, first as Vicar and then as Superior, to be the first to receive important Institute or Church information and to tell others about it, his comparative isolation from so many of the sources he had previously used caused him a certain frustration when he heard about important matters only at second hand or by accident. His presence in three Roman Synods, and especially his prominent position in the 1994 Synod on Consecrated life, had given him a certain public persona which seemed to have vanished.

Brother John was not the only one wondering what service he might now be able to offer at a regional level. The Brothers of the USA/Toronto Visitors' conference, while wishing to respect Brother John's own choices, were not quite sure how to make the best use of him in a way that respected the personal transition he was undergoing. Brother John himself felt that there might be some position at a national level that would allow him to implement the ideas on Shared Mission, Lasallian education at high school and college level, and

a more explicit religious education which he had promoted so successfully at the Strasbourg conference referred to earlier. But, as he himself had been absent for so long from the changes and developments in education in his own country, he came to realize that what he could offer was limited.

## **Regional Office**

It is not surprising, then, that the Visitors' Conference sought to use Brother John's talents more widely in inviting him to take responsibility for the coordination of the Lasallian Leadership Institute, a three-year program that included cohorts of present and future administrators from various Lasallian works in summer, spring and fall residential programs across the country. This meant residing in the Christian Brothers' Conference Community in Maryland, close to Washington DC, thereby providing Brother John with better opportunities for matters of national and international interest. This was to be his community for the next two years. Once again he threw himself into his task, attending meetings, coming to know the Lasallian Leadership cohorts in their sessions in various parts of USA, and directing the organization of sessions and the preparation of material through the Secretariate of the Christian Brothers' Conference.

Much of this work, however, was of an administrative nature. It consisted of arranging for the accommodation of the participants in college residences, hotels/pastoral centers/seminaries, ensuring transport for the speakers, the arrival of the necessary material and so on. He was used to having other people do this kind of work as he had worked all his years in Rome with both a personal and an executive secretary. For the past 24 years, moreover, all the things associa-

ted with his visits to the Institute all around the world – plane tickets, accommodation, being met at airports etc. – were arranged for him. Brother John had little or no part in preparing or delivering the content of the Lasallian Leadership Institute programs he organized, although he did eventually offer some seminars. This was certainly not the kind of work which made the best use of Brother John's talents and experience. At the same time, he was receiving requests from many different parts of the world to offer retreats and renewal programs, especially in formation programs in Africa.

### **Christian Brothers University, Memphis**

Mutual discernment between Brother John and the chairman of the Regional Conference eventually led to the establishment of a budget for Brother John to be able to respond to the invitations he was continuing to receive. Brother John then chose to return to Memphis as a member of the Christian Brothers' University community, where his close friend, longtime Vice-Chancellor of Bethlehem University, Brother Vincent Malham was President. He was now, for the first time for many years, in the city where he had grown up. Two of his brothers were living in Nashville. There were other relatives still living close by in Memphis and he saw his own nieces and nephews- and their children - more frequently. In a large community with established domestic services where he knew all the Brothers, he found himself much more at his ease. He was now available to respond to some among the many invitations he continued to receive for the pastoral work that he did so well. Once again, he entered with his usual enthusiasm into the life of the university, attended sporting events, came to know many of the young students

by name and loved to be in their company. The liking was mutual, as Brother Alvaro discovered when he spent three weeks in the Memphis community with him to improve his English.

### **Brother John's Illness**

In late 2006 Brother John's health began to deteriorate and for many months he underwent a number of operations and periods of convalescence. He continued to keep in touch by e-mail with a wide range of correspondents but it became evident that his illness had reached a critical stage. In spite of his illness, however, there was something he still wished to do.

### **Brother John's Intervention – General Chapter, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

As a former Superior General Brother John was a member by right of the 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter beginning at the end of April 2007 but the growing seriousness of his illness made it unlikely that he would be able to attend. It was no surprise, however, to those who knew him that Brother John persuaded his doctors and care-givers to allow him to attend for a short time. It is no exaggeration to say that Brother John's special intervention on restoring the original wording of the Formula of Vows was one of the most moving moments of the Chapter. It is a matter of great rejoicing for the Institute that this timely precision was accepted by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and has helped to restore the sense of the original vow of Association. Brother John's text is given in full.

## **Intervention by Brother John Johnston**

*In true Lasallian fashion I have three points, all of them referring to association from different perspectives.*

*1. Since last October I have come to understand and appreciate association in a new way. I had previously experienced association as a communion of persons united in their commitment to Lasallian mission. But during the past seven months, I have had an experience of association that I have never had before. The number and content of e-mail messages, letters, cards, telephone calls, visits, from Lasallians, both Brother and lay, have astounded me. The expressions of loving concern of so many have moved me profoundly.*

*I have been deeply touched by the concern of Brother Alvaro, Superior. He visited me in December and maintains regular contact by email. Brothers Bill Mann, Vicar, Miguel Campos, Gerard Rummery, and Rodolfo Meoli, Postulator, have all visited me in Memphis, visits I profoundly appreciate. Brother Frank Carr, my Visitor, has manifested consistent concern and has accompanied me through these months – and through this week.*

*And what can I say about Brother Alvaro's beautiful tribute in his opening address and your warm response. I thank you sincerely. I now have a much deeper understanding of association because I have experienced it in a new way.*

*What I have asked from you from the very beginning is that you pray that I am able to say YES to whatever the Lord asks of me now and in the future. I ask you to pray that I can drink the cup the Lord asks me to drink. That to me is what following Christ is all about.*

*2. We Lasallians live in unity, a unity very evident in this Chapter, but we live very different realities. A number of you represent areas*

*that are blessed with vocations. You look at your institutions and are confident that their future is assured.*

*Others of you have had few or even no vocations in the last decade or several decades. You have numerous Lasallian institutions. What is your plan? Do you intend to turn the schools over to others who will conduct them without direct reference to our Lasallian heritage? Or are you in the process of creatively, dynamically, courageously creating structures that will assure that our institutions continue as Lasallian – with Brothers we hope, but without Brothers if necessary. To create such structures of governance and of Lasallian formation is a formidable task. We have no time to waste.*

*It is my hope that the delegates consider this question seriously, inform themselves on initiatives in process, give their recommendations, and, above all, their encouragement.*

*3. My third point touches Evelyn's [Evelyn Joffre] observation this morning on the confusion surrounding the meaning of association as distinct from the Brothers' vow. My comments will not resolve the confusion.*

*Nevertheless, I am convinced that clarifying the meaning of the Brothers' vow of association is very necessary and will contribute to an understanding of association in general. Whether we are enthusiastic about the generalized use of the word "association" in the Institute or whether we have reservations, it is clear that the vow of association is something very different.*

*Our magnificent, theologically profound formula of consecration is as clear as clear can be. Nevertheless, a faulty and superficial interpretation over the centuries has led to a watered-down understanding of our consecration and of the vows that express that consecration.*

*Our Founder and the early Brothers understood the three vows they professed. In a sense the first paragraph of the formula, which expresses their act of total consecration to the Trinity said everything, because the Brothers knew what was coming later in the formula.*

*But each paragraph of the formula makes explicit and unambiguous the meaning of the preceding paragraph and makes more explicit the meaning of their total consecration. The second paragraph begins, *Pour cet effet, for this purpose – what purpose?: living the consecration to the Trinity just expressed. For this purpose they promise and vow to unite themselves (association for mission) and remain in the Society (stability) with Brothers who are associated to educate youth, poor youth especially, gratuitously. They then express their total availability for service. The following paragraph begins. C'est pourquoi - that is why, wherefore - we make the vows. The early Brothers vow association for mission, and render the vow more precise by the vows of stability and obedience.**

*At the time of the Bull of Approbation, the Brothers adopt vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, counsels lived by the Brothers from the beginning, but not expressed by vow, Stability and teaching gratuitously are added in the next paragraph. Association is no longer at the center of the Brothers' consecration. In fact, it is not listed as a vow.*

*Two words in the original formula are precious to me. In the second paragraph each Brother said I promise and vow to unite themselves and remain in the society with a commitment to mission.*

*The words and vow remained in the formula until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Why they were removed, I do not know. But from that time, the Brothers say only I promise. Instead of professing four vows in view of association for mission, the integrating dimension of our vocation, the Brothers make vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, sta-*

*bility, and teaching gratuitously. The notion of vowed association, probably already meaningless to most Brothers, is simply ignored.*

*Today, instead of vowing association explicitly in the second paragraph, we promise association. We then proceed to profess vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, association for the educational service of the poor, and stability. Association is now an extra vow, our 4<sup>th</sup> vow, instead of the integrating vow of our consecrated life.*

*My personal view is that it is possible canonically to revise the formula by adding the and vow and by editing slightly other parts of the formula. The addition does not add another vow, but does in fact place our other vows at the service of association for mission. It is my experience that when we can show the Holy See that a change is fully justified in the light of our heritage, we succeed in effecting change.*

*It is my sincere hope that the delegates will consider the possibility of this change with documentation that will help our present and future Brothers understand the profound significance of the vow of association for the identity of the Brother.*

Brother Bernard Lococo, close friend of Brother John for many years, recalls his last visit to Memphis when John's illness was far advanced

*We had planned a "trip down memory lane." We spent time visiting the cemetery where his family is buried, the house where his mother grew up, the various houses where he lived, the school and parish where he studied and prayed, the playgrounds of his former years and finally had lunch where the family often enjoyed BBQ. It was during lunch that he reflected on the seriousness of his illness. He said that if a cure were possible he would prefer that the return to health be provided to some youngster at St. Jude's hospital rather than to him. He felt that he had had a wonderful life and that others*

*should have the same opportunity. In a way, this final statement summarizes who John was ... a person called to be for others*

## **Brother John's death October 11<sup>th</sup> 2007**

The news that Brother John had died was communicated to the Institute by Brother Alvaro, Superior General, in the following notice on the Institute website.

*Brothers and members of the Lasallian Family,*

*I have the painful duty to inform you of the death of Br. John Johnston our beloved and respected 25<sup>th</sup> Superior General.*

*As we all know, his illness which began a little over a year ago obliged him to change a calendar still full of activities in favour of many sectors of the Institute. When I accompanied him last July in Memphis, for three weeks, his will was identified in such a manner with that of God that the only thing which animated him was responding to His mysterious plan of love: 'May it be what God wishes' he often said to me.*

*Br. John Johnston was a distinguished member of our Institute and had a profound influence on Brothers and Lay Lasallians all over the world. This happened first of all in his religious Province of Saint Louis, Missouri, where he held responsibilities in the formation of young Brothers and where he became Provincial. Later it was as Vicar General of the Institute (1976-1986) and as Superior General for two periods of seven years (1986-2000). For a number of years he was also Vice President of the USG (Union of Superiors General) always defending strongly the value of the vocation of Brother in the Church and participated in three Synods, being Assistant Secretary of the Synod on the Consecrated Life. At the end of his mandates as Superior General he was in charge of the Department of Education of the Lasallian Region of USA/Toronto; he was*

*also in charge of a Foundation for the defense of children and traveled around the Lasallian world giving Retreats and attending Assemblies, Meetings...*

*I have known Brother John from when he was a Brother Visitor, thanks to his trips to Guatemala to visit the American Brothers who were directing some schools there. Even then I was struck by his strong personality and the authenticity of his life. Brother John was already the Vicar General when the terrible earthquake occurred in Guatemala, leaving more than 20,000 dead. His fraternal visit at that time left me with a profound impression. Afterwards, as we all know, I had the good fortune to become his Vicar General and it was especially at that time that I came to know in even greater depth his exceptional qualities and be enriched by his presence.*

*I want to share with you for a few moments some of the traits of his personality that have made the greatest impact on me. I have felt Brother John to be a man of convictions, spiritual depth, and profound interior life; his sense of Lasallian values was contagious for all of us and he had an extraordinary capacity for leadership. He always remained close to young people as I was able to observe once again in my recent visit to Memphis last summer, a time when we had an encounter with a group of Young Volunteers with whom Brother John had a beautiful relationship of friendship. Another of his characteristics was his love of the Church, a clear and filial love.*

*On a personal level, I much appreciate the vigorous impulse that he gave to association with our lay partners and to the shared mission as well as his interest in the rebirth of the Institute in several countries of Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and his special care for our missionary development in Africa and Asia. A special mention should be made of his concern for the Rights of the Children and his energetic support for Bethlehem University in its*

*service to the People of Palestine. Besides all of this we well remember his visits and his writings which have given such a strong thrust to the renewal of the Institute and its mission.*

*Finally, I do not want to forget to point out another aspect of the life of Brother John that has been an inspiration for me. It is the love for his family, here present. I saw it as a love expressed with affection, closeness and admiration. I had the chance to share some time with Michael, his priestly brother as well as with Edward and his family during my last visit. Their fondness and mutual support were most impressive. To his brothers and to all of his family, whom I have had the opportunity to know and appreciate, I present in the name of the Institute, my most sincere condolences, knowing that beyond the sorrow of your separation, what must most stand out for you is a justifiable pride in this exceptional Brother who, as the Gospel expresses in speaking of Jesus, Went about his life doing good.*

*At the end of our 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter in a session of homage to Brother John, three Brothers that stood as representatives of the three official languages of the Institute, expressed the appreciation that we all felt for his person at the time when he was completing his ministry of animation for the Institute in the year 2000. Permit me to cite some of those testimonies:*

*Brother Jacques d'Huiteau, at the time Provincial of France and now General Councilor said: 'An understanding man yet firm, never superficial. His pastoral letters underscore criteria for what is essential to move forward. They attract us by their clear reflection. I value his respect for the diverse Regions of the Institute, encouraging us to respond to the challenges that all of us have.'*

*For his part Brother José Manuel Agirrezabalaga, at the time Visitor of the Central District of Spain, added; 'Brother John has hel-*

ped us to look both at the present as well as the future in a proactive way. His themes have been the Defense of the Rights of the Child, the new apostolic commitments for the poor, the Lasallian perspective of today's reality and a creative fidelity to wipe out the separation between words and deeds.'

*And finally, Brother Thomas Johnson, Vicar General today, who was the Regional Coordinator for the United States and Toronto, affirmed: 'He speaks with passion for the rights of children. He knows the Brothers by name and encourages them. He knows when to move forward slowly: serene yet passionate. I have valued his vision, his ability to adapt and his realism.'*

*We had the joy of having Brother John with us during the first week of our 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. We all recall with feeling his intervention on the centrality of our Vow of Association for the Service of the Poor. In that memorable occasion Brother John shared the new manner in which he himself was living this association because of his sickness. These were his words:*

*'As of last October I understand and esteem association in a new way. Before that time I had experienced association as the communion of persons united in their commitment for the Lasallian mission. However, for the past six months I have had an experience of association that I hadn't felt before. The number and the contents of the messages I've had through e-mails, letters, cards, telephone calls, visits and so on, from Lasallians, both Brothers as well as lay persons, have truly been astonishing. The affectionate expressions of concern from so many have profoundly moved me. I now have a deeper understanding of association because I have experienced it in a new way. And opening his heart he asked us to pray for him, that I may be able to say YES to what God asks of me now and in the future. I ask that you pray that I can drink of the chalice that the Lord asks me to drink. For me this is all that following Christ means.'*

*I would not want to end this brief biographical note, which will be followed later by one of our Circulars without thanking the Community of CBU of Memphis for the brotherly accompaniment that you have given to Brother John in these last months of his life. I have been so struck by the witness of fraternity, attention and support that in every moment you have shown as true Brothers. My gratitude also for your wonderful nurse, Pat Bader, who has been a real guardian angel for John.*

*Fraternally in De La Salle  
Br. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría  
Superior General FSC*

## **Homily by Brother Vincent Malham**

This homily, given by Brother Vincent Malham, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Memphis, at the Mass of Resurrection on October 18, 2007, is a worthy tribute to the Brother that John was.

*Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

*I would like to express my gratitude to the Johnston family for extending me the privilege of speaking at this Eucharist celebrating the life of Brother John, and to Bishop Steib, for granting me the permission to do so.*

*In this homily I wish to focus on spiritual aspects of the life of my brother and friend, John. At the end of Mass, Brother Alvaro, our Superior General, will offer his unique perspective on Brother John's life and accomplishments and Ed Johnston, brother of John, will speak on behalf of the family. Inasmuch as a significant part of my reflections uses John's own words to describe the image of the cup, a symbol of profound importance to him, I have presumed to have John speak for himself in this homily. I concluded that it would be*

*more practical to ask forgiveness afterwards rather than to seek permission in advance.*

*I, John*

*And so we begin. Dear Friends, the readings from Scripture and the musical selections that I, John, requested for this Eucharistic Celebration of Resurrection have been carefully chosen, for they reveal key beliefs, convictions and inspirations of my life. They give insight into how I tried to live my life and the manner in which I prepared to die. Because my deeply-felt reflections on "Am I not to drink this cup?" are integral to my spiritual journey, I have asked that they also be shared.*

*I find great meaning in the second reading from Romans 10:9-15: "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God on their behalf is for salvation...For Christ is the end of the law for the justification of everyone who has faith...for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." But what does it mean to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, and that you will be saved?*

*To respond to this fundamental question of Christianity, I would like to share with you the following experience which had a profound influence on my life.*

*"Am I not to drink the cup which the Father has given me?"*

*"Three years ago, I had the privilege of spending four weeks with young Brothers of the Lwanga District (in Africa): a workshop with student Brothers and a retreat with the novices.*

*"The novices' retreat took place in a beautiful center several hours from Nairobi. The feature that most impressed me about the center was the outdoor, life-sized Way of the Cross. This Way of the Cross,*

*work of an outstanding African artist, includes not only the traditional stations, but also an additional eleven or twelve, most of them representing scenes in the life of Jesus.*

*“One of the stations in particular moved me profoundly, so much so that I returned to it every afternoon of the retreat. The station commemorates Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died. Jesus is on his knees, holding an oversized cup, the cup that represents for him the will of God in his regard, the cup the Father is asking him to drink.*

*“This station touched me so intensely that I made a study of all the passages I could find in the Bible that employ the symbolism of the cup. I made a list of pertinent passages and placed it in a ceramic chalice. For the last few years, that chalice has had a prominent place in my bedroom.*

*“All four evangelists make use of the powerful symbol of drinking the cup. Mark recounts Jesus’ reply to James and John when they asked to sit at his right side. You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I shall drink?*

*“Drinking the cup: a metaphor for what being a disciple of Jesus is all about.*

*“Jesus is the WAY. He tells us in words and shows us in action what it means to be truly human. Nowhere is that message more poignant than Jesus’ experience in Gethsemane. Mark says Jesus begins to feel terror and anguish. We have to take these words at face value: terror and anguish. Jesus is like us. He is terrified at the thought of what is going to happen to him. No phony superhero here! My soul is sorrowful to the point of death, he says to Peter, James, and John. In his anguish, he throws himself to the ground and prays that, if possible, the threatening hour pass him by.*

*“Abba, Father, for you everything is possible. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done.*

*“Drinking this cup leads Jesus to the cross. His terror and anguish does not leave him. He shouts, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We know, however, that Jesus moves beyond that feeling of abandonment and cries out YES to what his Father is permitting to happen to him. We know because after his death, the veil of the Sanctuary is torn in two from top to bottom. What is more, the centurion, standing in front of him and seeing how he dies, exclaims, In truth this man was the Son of God.*

*“To be a disciple of Jesus is to live with arms outstretched, in an attitude of YES to whatever God wills. It is to stand before the Father as Jesus did and to cry out,*

*‘My Father, if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done.’ (Brother John)*

*Let us continue. The foundation of my vocation as a Brother finds its inspiration in today’s other two readings, the first from Isaiah and the Gospel from Mark. “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” “Here I am, Lord: I said; “Send me!”” And he replied: “Go...You are to make the heart of this people sluggish, to dull their ears and close their eyes; else their eyes will see, their ears hear, their hearts understand, and they will turn and be healed.”*

*And in Mark Jesus says: ‘Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these... Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it. Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.’*

*I believe I was called to be a vowed religious, an educator with a special predilection to serve young people, especially those most in need. In a Pastoral Letter to the Brothers in 1999 I wrote: 'We Brothers of the Christian Schools –and all other members of the Lasallian Family– should be in solidarity with disadvantaged children on the local, national, and international level, clearly identified with their struggle, and creatively and effectively active for them through our mission of human and Christian education.' Simplicity, ingenuousness, lack of affectation, honesty, wholesomeness, enthusiasm for the future were important values to me, attributes which I saw in young people and strove to emulate in my own life.*

*After teaching for several years as a young Brother, I freely accepted the call and will of the Brothers to be a leader with challenging administrative responsibilities on many levels in turbulent times, striving to discern God's will for the future for my Brothers and Lasallian colleagues.*

*I drank the cup of obedience, facing the harsh reality of diminishing numbers of Brothers and tried to expand our Institute to willingly embrace lay colleagues, volunteers and associates as partners in our mission of education. 'It was my burning desire to discern God's will for the future, to forge an Institute supported by a strong vision and realistic adaptability. As confident as I was about God's providence in the new and in the Holy Spirit's direction, I tried to be supportive of all for whom the times provided a burden or a special challenge.' (taken from remarks by Brother Jeffrey Gros). 'Ecce Quam Bonum', 'How good it is for Brothers (and I would add associates) to live together in unity'. This song which beautifully expresses our unique brotherhood and identity, I often sang and tried to live, wherever I was called to serve. I was motivated by the conviction that 'An association of loving persons freely committed to the same ideal is a group with power—legitimate power at the service of the Lord*

*and of the Church; a power to do really worthwhile and significant things.’ (from “The Brother in Association”, Lasalliana 05-C-17). I was strongly encouraged and inspired by our young Lasallians and associates and convinced that they were indispensable for a dynamic Lasallian future.*

*Jesus was my brother, friend and the guiding light of my life. I ate, and drank, at his table, and was nourished by his word and example. He constantly reminded me not to be afraid, that he would go before me always, to come and follow him.*

*And he often challenged me: “John, can you drink the cup?” “Will you follow me into the Garden of Gethsemane?” Little did I realize how difficult saying “yes” would become, especially in those final days and hours ...*

*I believe the way a person dies reflects in large measure how that person tried to live.*

- 1. In my life, I, John, tried to accept and resign myself in faith to God’s will in my regard: to go wherever I was sent and to do whatever was required of me by my superiors, and by the will of the Brothers, as I vowed to do.*
- 2. During this past year when my health situation changed dramatically, I resolved with all my strength to continue living life to the fullest, to communicate lovingly with my family, friends, Brothers, Lasallian associates – and to teach, by example, what it is to live, and to die, as a Christian, a Christian Brother, a man of faith, brother of Jesus, son of a compassionate and loving God.*
- 3. With every ounce of determination I could muster I willed to drink the cup – all of it – its soothing, comforting flavor, its bitter and distasteful drops – even in those moments when it seemed near-impossible to raise it to my lips.*

4. *When I was afraid, I believed with all my heart and mind and spirit that my Savior and brother Jesus was walking with me, comforting and encouraging me, guiding me every step of the way into the eternal peace that he had promised.*

5. *For I knew with unwavering conviction, that to answer the call to be an authentic Christian Brother, to be a faithful disciple of Him whose name I bore, I would have to live with arms outstretched, in an attitude of YES to whatever God willed, to stand before the Father as Jesus did and to cry out, "My Father, if this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done."*

*I, John, would like most to be remembered, not as a strong and visionary leader, nor as a gifted person who worked hard and accomplished many significant things in my life. I, John, would like to be remembered as a faithful disciple of Jesus who drank the cup.*