



**1. Lasallian
association:
a rainbow**

Lasallian association: a rainbow

I. Between the origins and today

I.1 The Beginning of the Story

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

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

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

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

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

I.2 The Story Continues

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

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

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



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

2. The message of the origins

2.1 Mission Summons Communion

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

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

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

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

2.2 A Project of Fraternity

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

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

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

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

Solidarity
A Communion
Among
Equals

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

2.3 Consecration, the Root and the Guarantee of the Project

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

Before continuing, it would be appropriate to recover this concept of “consecration,” with all its density, so that it is not reduced to the idea of an individual religious relationship with God.

The Lasallian concept of “consecration” is much richer, and it binds together three targets in the same covenant: God, the Brothers, and poor children and young people for whom the work is destined. Consecration to God acts as a guarantee of the other two covenants or commitments, it looks upon God as a witness and a supporter of our covenant with other associates and with the beneficiaries of the work. Understood in that way, the project of fraternity is substantially strengthened, and, although the project is prior to consecration, consecration constitutes the foundation and the guarantee of the project. The consecration/association of De La Salle with two Brothers in 1691, and with twelve Brothers in 1694, is the most decisive foundational event for the Lasallian Institute, but also, in the judgment of the 43rd General Chapter in 2000, “it is the source of Lasallian associations of lay persons and religious who wish to be part of the Lasallian Mission” (Circular 447, page 3).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

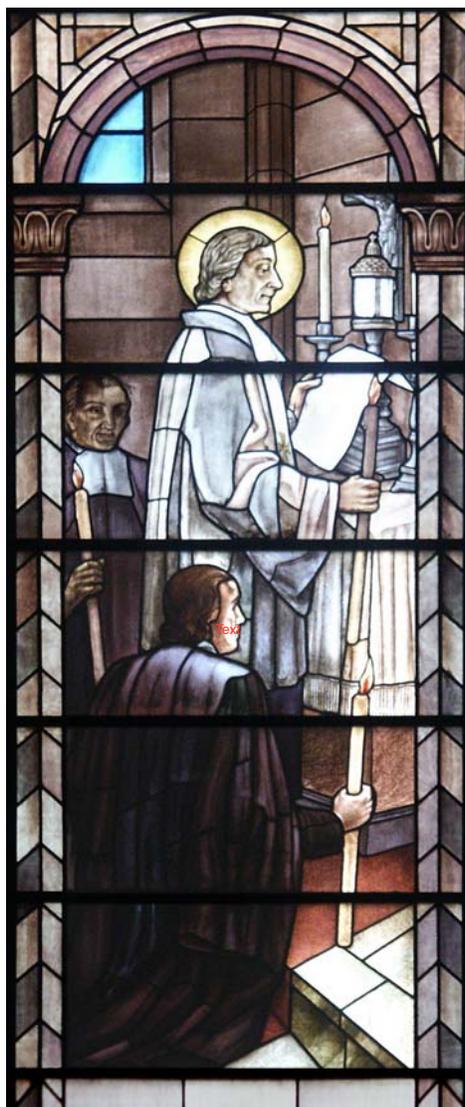


Photo: JAW

Consecration
God
Brothers
Poor Children

Solidarity
Stability for the
sake of the
project

1691
1694

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

They vow to support one another for the sake of the foundation

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

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

Maybe we should say who we are with who we vow to support

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. A dynamic of life

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

3.1 The Creative Force of the Mission

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

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

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

3.2 The Regenerative Force of Fraternity

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

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

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

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

"Our very dear Father,

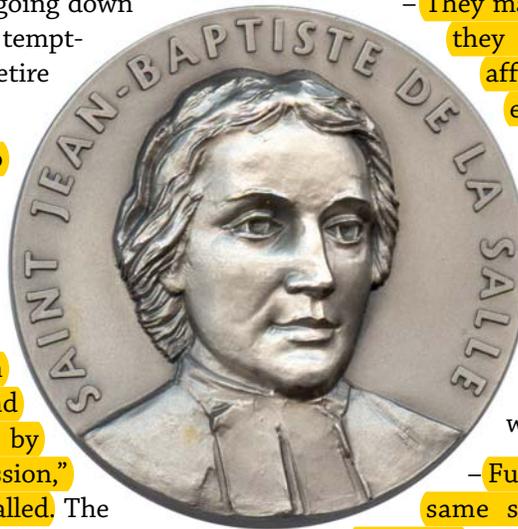
We, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools, concerned about the glory of God and the greater good of the Church and of our Society, recognize that it is of grave importance that you return to take charge of the care of this work of God which is also your work, given that it has pleased the Lord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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

3.3 The Integrating Force of Consecration

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

in the Christian education of children.

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

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

- The interpretation of fraternity starting out from consecration

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

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

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

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

in all of their conduct.” (EM 2, 26)

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

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

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

4. The colors of the rainbow today

4.1 Participating in the project: a road with many options

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

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

This explains why, within the project and the Lasallian

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

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

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

4.2 Generating the Lasallian Rainbow

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

and how it is made up.

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

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



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

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

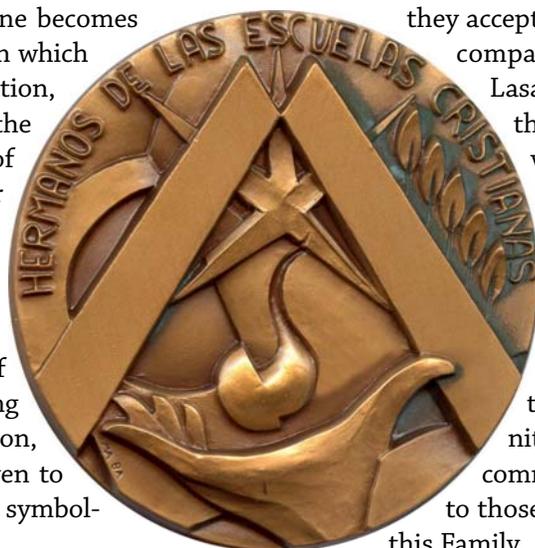
4.3 The Brothers: the Heart, Memory, and Guarantee

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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