

## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT MOMENT IN LASALLIAN ASSOCIATION

In response to the keynote address that Brother Bob Schieler, Superior General, delivered to LASSCA (Lasallian Association of Secondary School Chief Administrators) on March 1, 2017, Charlie Legendre, Chair of the LEC (Lasallian Education Council of RELAN) followed up with Brother Bob regarding the new forms of association that he spoke about in his speech.

### Follow-up

“What led you to voice the need for new forms of association to emerge? Did you have particular, more formalized types of association in mind? And why do you see RELAN as a likely place for new forms of association to take shape?” (Charlie Legendre)

### The Present Situation

The Institute continues to experience rapid demographic change; a pace that has accelerated in recent years due to the average age of the Brothers and the few vocations to the Brothers life for the past several decades. Given the diminishment in the number of Brother and their collective age, fewer and fewer are actively involved in the mission.

One result of this is current faculty and staff in the global ministries of the Institute have little or no direct daily contact with Brothers. We are three generations away from the 39th General Chapter of Renewal. At that time the Brothers were still the majority in many of our schools and institutions. A generation later, many of our educational institutions were blessed with a mixture of Brothers and Partners. In these two generations there were examples of people imbued with the Lasallian charism and familiar with the heritage. Also, in the second generation, almost by osmosis, faculty members “captured” the charism and the way “Brothers do things”. Current faculty and staff are the third generation since the 1966-67 39th General Chapter. This present generation teach, administer and staff Lasallian schools where there are no Brothers or only one or two in a peripheral capacity.

Of course, the Institute has been aware of this reality and have been proactive in our response, particularly in the areas of sharing the mission and providing formation for faculties and staffs. Regions and Districts have offered excellent Lasallian formation programs for a number of years, some programs more comprehensive and sequential than others. Nevertheless, many partners have been introduced to some aspects of the life of Saint La Salle and the Lasallian heritage. Some Regions and Districts have created structures for the vitality and viability of the Lasallian mission; functioning mission councils are an example. Annual assemblies and conferences in some districts and regions are other examples.

Hopefully in those Districts that have been fortunate to have substantive formation experiences such as RELAN’s Buttimer, LLI, LSJI, and the John Johnston Institute, there exist a critical mass of faculty who have good Lasallian knowledge and have internalized that knowledge as integral to the own vocation as Lasallian educators. I believe this is the case for many of our RELAN Partners.

### The Past as Prologue

The passage from modernity to post-modernity has devastated many cultural and mega-narratives. For more than 50 years, our world, our Church and our Institute have been searching for new sustaining narratives. For the world, the narrative of modernity has lost its meaning; we now speak of living in the post-modern or trans-modern world, a world still in search of a definition, unifying purpose, and ultimate meaning. For our Church, the Second Vatican Council brought the Church into the modern age just as that age was giving way to

post-modernity. Fifty years ago, the delegates to the 39th General Chapter and the authors of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, began to write a new narrative for our Institute. The Declaration is a catalyst that continues to move us to develop this new narrative.

The three generations referred to above have been living into this new narrative for the Lasallian charism. We can say that the Declaration, a document unlike any other in the history of the Lasallian movement, was the introductory chapter to the present Lasallian narrative.

In the biography of Brother Michel Sauvage (*Lasallian Studies*, 18), we read that the development of the Declaration involved a long process of maturation. This process of maturation continues today. Successive General Chapters, revisions to the Brothers' Rule, and publications such as *The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A Shared Mission*, Circulars 461 (*Associated for the Lasallian Mission... an Act of Hope*) and 466 (*They Will call themselves Brothers*) are each a chapter of this unfolding narrative.

In the former USA-Toronto Region, publications and events contributed to the development of a coherent and compelling narrative. The "Characteristics of Lasallian Schools" (1986), "Shared Mission" (1995), the Lasallian Mission Regional Assembly (2005), and the "Lasallian Education Brand Guide" (2011) all contribute to the unfolding definition, purpose, and meaning of association.

Going Forward

Two questions I ponder as we live the narrative are these: is the Lasallian formation provided these many years sufficient, in the absence of Brothers, to maintain into the future, the Lasallian character of our educational institutions? Or might something new and different ultimately emerge? And if the latter, what do we need to be attentive to? Regarding the former a reflection by a Belgian Brother is worth noting.

In the early 1990s the District of North Belgium, realizing the ageing of the Brothers and the lack of vocations to the priesthood and Religious life, began the "Lasallianization" of their schools that involved District-wide research, analysis and the development of an assessment instrument of the fundamental Lasallian elements essential for a Lasallian school. In 1995 the schools signed an official document asserting their commitment to the Lasallian heritage. The District also created a Lasallian Education Association and a foundation to support the Association. The Association is responsible for the management of the schools and Lasallian formation of personnel. The leadership are lay with an 82-year-old Brother serving as advisor. In the 22 years since, several of their schools merged with other networks resulting in a weakening or complete disappearance of the Lasallian charism. In others, the new boards and administrations have distanced themselves from their Lasallian identity. The process of the past two decades was one of transition. Now, however, those schools remaining in the network are faced with transformation, asking themselves what will this transformation look like and how to go forward with it.

The District of France is a more recent example confronting the transition/transformation challenge. In 2011 they initiated a new type of Association. Six hundred Partners and Brothers were invited to take responsibility for 40 apostolates. The invitation includes the establishment of virtual or actual communities for these apostolates comprised of Brothers and Partners. Each community petitions the Visitor to recognize them and their apostolate as Lasallian and must have the Visitor's approval. This initiative is in its early stages; only a portion of the 40 apostolates have been identified.

Why RELAN?

The Lasallian charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to the Church in view of human and Christian education. The Brothers joyfully share the same mission together with their Partners who recognize and live the Lasallian charism. Together, they ensure the vitality of this charism by creating or developing organizational, formation and research structures, in which each one can deepen their understanding of their own vocation and of the Lasallian Mission (Rule, 19)

In addition to the examples of Belgium and France, there are other districts and regions trying to anticipate an unknown future. These are districts and regions that still have a critical mass of Brothers, Partners and financial resources; they continue to be vital and viable. RELAN and its respective districts are examples of still having sufficient human and financial resources. The Region and Districts also have long experience responding to the evolving reality of the Institute and Lasallian mission during the past half century.

The region's response has been more than a reaction to the diminishment in vocations to the consecrated life of the Brothers. It has been a response to the conviction that the Holy Spirit is moving in our midst, and is calling forth from today's educators the same free, generous offering of time, talent, and treasure for young people. This response has shown itself to be rooted in the conviction that association is crucial to "ensure the vitality of the charism."

RELAN and its Districts have:

- had Lasallian formation programs for several decades in which hundreds of Brothers and Partners have participated. One aspect of this formation has been discussion and reflection on Lasallian association and the pros and cons of formal or informal "belonging as an associate".

- functioning mission councils of Partners and Brothers.

- Partners on the administration teams of all Districts.

- Partners in the majority of chief administrators on all levels.

- a well-staffed Regional office with trained and committed Lasallians. educational centers free of any government control over hiring of faculty and staff, enabling our schools to recruit people open to seeing their profession as vocation.

- universities that can be called upon to undertake research and conduct studies on the current reality of the Lasallian mission, creating scenarios of possible futures.

For these reasons among others that you can cite, I believe the time is now - for the Institute, Regions and Districts - in a more intentional manner, to begin visioning the Lasallian mission in for the 21st century. Finally, anticipating that RELAN's history of creative engagement will continue, I think of the region as a likely place for new forms of association to take shape.