

A GUIDE FOR THE ASSOCIATE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Association for Mission has been a continuing subject of reflection in the District of Francophone Canada of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. What has been most frequently highlighted is the fundamental fact that leads the way for everyone who wishes to experience the Lasallian charism: the educational service of young people, especially those who are poor.

This vast topic would require a complete formation program to achieve the necessary clarity. The purpose of this present document is far more modest. *A Guide for the Associate* was created by the District's Committee on Association (COMAS) to present succinctly some basic information about St. John Baptist de La Salle and his Institute, the Lasallian charism, association for the mission, and the formation program needed to acquire, develop, and possibly make formal the commitment to the mission.

Because these various topics occur here only in summary fashion, additional reading and activities are required to develop them to achieve the objectives of the formation program that COMAS is creating.

Insofar as the development of association for the mission is concerned, COMAS considers the process, above all, to be a personal initiative in which each and every one discovers the form of association that best corresponds to the person's understanding of the situation. The committee believes, however, that this process must include a number of specific components. A formula to express the commitment and elements of a corresponding ritual are included in this document as examples. Those who decide to make a commitment are invited to create a personal format to express their decision.

Bonne route to all the associates for the Lasallian mission!

2. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE FOUNDER OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE (1651–1719)

John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and Patron of Christian Educators, was born in a world totally different than what we experience. The firstborn of wealthy parents, he lived in France 350 years ago. Born in Reims in 1651, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle received the tonsure at the age of 11 and was appointed a canon of the cathedral of Reims at the age of 16. On the death of his parents, he had to assume the management of family affairs while completing his theological studies which led to his ordination to the priesthood on April 9, 1678. Two years later, he was recognized as a Doctor of Theology. During this same period, a number of events led him to become involved with a group of rough and illiterate young men for the purpose of founding schools for poor boys.

At that time few people were living luxuriously, while the majority, whether rural peasants or city dwellers, lived in conditions of extreme poverty. Only a small number of parents could send their children to school; the majority of those students had little hope for the future. Moved by the condition of poor students who seemed "so far from salvation," De La Salle decided to dedicate his talents and education to the service of these children, "often left to themselves and badly brought up." To make his decision more effective, he left the De La Salle family home, moved in with the schoolmasters, renounced his position as canon as well as his inheritance, and gradually formed the community we know today as the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

De La Salle's project encountered stiff opposition from ecclesiastical authorities who opposed the creation of this new form of religious life: a community of consecrated laypeople conducting schools "together and by association." Their innovative methods and their absolute will to be free of charge for all students, totally indifferent to whether parents could pay, shocked the educational establishment. De La Salle and his brothers, in spite of everything, successfully created a network of quality schools characterized by using the vernacular language, grouping students according to level of achievement, providing appropriate religious instruction by teachers whose vocation was religious as well as missionary, and involving the parents in the school. Furthermore, De La Salle was a pioneer in offering training programs for lay teachers and Sunday classes for young workers. He created one of the first boarding schools for court-assigned delinquents. Overwhelmed by a life of austerities and toil, he died at Saint Yon, near Rouen, in 1719, a few weeks before his 68th birthday.

John Baptist de La Salle is the first to establish training centers for teachers, apprenticeship schools for delinquents, technical schools, and secondary schools in modern languages, arts, and sciences. His work spread quickly throughout France and, after his death, the world. In 1900 John Baptist de La Salle was canonized, and in 1950, because of his life and his inspired writings, the Church declared him to be the patron saint of teachers. John Baptist de La Salle demonstrated how to teach and to be concerned for young people, how to face deficiencies and weaknesses with compassion, and how to support, to strengthen, and to heal. Today, Lasallian schools exist in 80 countries around the world.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

THE PURPOSE AND THE SPIRIT OF THE INSTITUTE

(Chapter 1, *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1987, pp. 23–24)

1. As he became aware, by God's grace, of the human and spiritual distress of "the children of the artisans and the poor," John Baptist de La Salle devoted himself to forming schoolmasters totally dedicated to teaching and to Christian education. He brought these teachers together in a community and subsequently founded with them the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.
2. The Brothers, in fidelity to the call of the Spirit and the charism of their Founder, consecrate themselves to God in order to exercise, by association, their apostolic ministry of education....
3. The purpose of this Institute is to give a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it....
The Christian school, which has always to be given new vitality, is the preferred field for the activity of the Brothers. The Institute also explores other possibilities for teaching and education more adapted to the needs of time and place.

THE MISSION OF THE INSTITUTE

(Chapter 2, *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1987, pp. 34–36)

A Shared mission

17. Ever since the time of their foundation, the Brothers have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry.

The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. They provide, for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit.

The Brothers cooperate in forming Christian teachers. They help them to develop their professional competence and also to become increasingly involved in the work of the Church and in the field of education.

17c. The Brothers' community makes 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. The Brothers join in the formation of faith communities which are witnessing to the truth of what the Brothers profess.

Taking into account the new situations it experiences globally, the Institute constantly reviews the paths that the *Rule* outlines. This evaluation is precisely the function of the General Chapter that convenes periodically. The 42nd General Chapter, in 1993, gave a prominent role to the mission shared with laypeople and invited a consideration of the growing place held by the laity in the mission of the Institute as “*a call from God to take our place as laity consecrated*” in religious life alongside our colleagues in “*a common and shared mission.*” The 43rd General Chapter, in 2000, had this explicit theme: “*Associated for the educational service of the poor as a Lasallian response to the challenges of the 21st century.*”
LASALLIAN ASSOCIATION (43rd General Chapter, 2000)

During this 43rd General Chapter, Lasallian Association occupied the primary place and was the subject of the first proposition.

1. In light of the guidelines of the 43rd General Chapter, each Region, District, Sub-District, and Delegation shall foster groups of Partners and/or Associates and Brothers, or of Partners and/or Associates among themselves, to reflect on their identity in relation to the Lasallian mission and to develop forms of association.
2. The Institute has a long educational presence with young people and with educators of other faiths. We ask that this reflection continues to develop in the Institute on how we share the Lasallian charism with educators and with youth of other religions. Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations shall establish study groups on this theme.

Proposition 1

In order to promote and to support the process of developing Lasallian Association for the educational service of the poor in the next seven years, each Region, District, Sub-District, and Delegation shall choose concrete actions to promote the birth and the development of groups of Partners and/or Associates and Brothers, or of Partners and/or Associates, to reflect on their identity in relation to the Lasallian mission and to develop forms of association.

4. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE IN CANADA

It is in 1837 that the first brothers debark at Montréal, upon the urgent invitation of Bishop Bourget, a firm believer in education. Thus, this is the first community of teaching brothers in Québec. These four French brothers do not remain alone for long. More French confrères join them in a local grouping that quickly takes shape. By the 1960s, the Brothers of the Christian Schools number 1,300 members in French Canada.

In time, the Brothers of the Christian Schools are found in towns and villages all along the St. Lawrence River and its main tributaries. They settle in Québec City in 1843, in Trois-Rivières a year later, and in Ottawa in 1864. The Institute also expands, in 1848, to New York on the initiative of one of the founding brothers in Québec, not to mention its spread in Western Canada, notably in the diocese of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan.

Following in the footsteps of their founder, who always favored education for everyone, the brothers focus on primary schools for boys and put forward several initiatives to meet the needs of young people at the time.

In the struggle for *le fait français* in Ontario

Few people outside of Ontario are aware of the commitment of the brothers on behalf of “*le fait français*” (French presence, culture, language). Arriving in 1864 in that province, the brothers will continue their work with young people in schools. They will be pioneers with the first French secondary schools and will play an important role in the struggle for “*le fait français*” in Ontario by contesting the 1912 regulation prohibiting the teaching of French.

An always active presence

The District of Francophone Canada today includes all the brothers of Québec province and those of the city of Ottawa, Ontario province, and numbers 206 brothers. Despite their fairly high average age, the dynamism is strong.

Some noteworthy Lasallian figures

In Québec City, we remember Brother Clément Locqwell, a professor at Laval University who had a literary column in the daily *Le Soleil* and presented the evening commentary on the airwaves of a radio station. The College of Administration of Laval University still retains the memory of its founders, including Brother Palasis Prince and Brother Siméon Hardy. Both of them helped to create the Department of Commerce, which will later become the Department of Administration Sciences.

As a recognized entomologist and professor, Brother Firmin Laliberté also distinguished himself by his remarkable work in this discipline. As some other notable personalities did, he donated his collection, of butterflies, to the Montréal Insectarium.

However, the most famous member of the family of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is undoubtedly Brother Marie-Victorin, founder of the Montréal Botanical Garden and Botanical Institute. He inspired several generations to continue his work up to this day.

It should also be noted that in Canada, in addition to the District of Francophone Canada, there is the Delegation of Toronto with about thirty English-speaking brothers.

To learn more about the history of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Canada, read the three volumes of *Les Frères des Écoles chrétiennes au Canada*, by Nive Voisine, historian and researcher (Université Laval).

5. LASALLIAN CHARISM

(The following summary is based on conferences by Father Laurent Boisvert)

In the document *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II defines charisms, whether extraordinary or simple and humble, as gifts of the Holy Spirit that directly or indirectly have an ecclesial purpose, ordered for the upbuilding of the Church for the benefit of humanity and of the needs of the world. In *Vita Consecrata*, he applies this definition to Institutes of Consecrated Life by affirming, "The manifold charisms of their respective Institutes are granted by the Holy Spirit for the good of the entire Mystical Body, whose upbuilding they must serve." (VC, 47) In short, charism is a gift of the Spirit for the Church.

Charism, as a concept, has four components:

1. **Vision:** to perceive the Gospel from a specific perspective.
2. **Incarnation:** to live the Gospel in relation to this perspective.
3. **Mission:** to be a witness for this aspect of the Gospel.
4. **Effectiveness:** to upbuild the Church by this witness.

Vision

The first component of the charism of an Institute is its particular perception of the entire Gospel, a specific interpretation given by the founder, who is open to the movement of the Spirit. This particular insight into the total mystery of Christ is motivated by the desire to live profoundly as a disciple.

The image of Christ as teacher is the aspect with which John Baptist de La Salle perceived the totality of the Christian mystery that unified his life. Christ, through his being, his actions, and his words, made the people he met become, grow, and mature on human and spiritual levels. The founder had to be particularly concerned about the Gospel passages that relate the actions and words of Jesus about education, that is, what Jesus said and did to help people realize themselves. By understanding and living his Christian life in this way, he integrated and harmonized both his apostolic activity and his faith in the God of Jesus Christ.

The educational service of poor people to which De La Salle devoted his life consists, first and foremost, in helping them to become what John Paul II calls "active subjects," that is to say, endowed with conscience, freedom, and responsibility. Since the person has a social dimension, human formation must include the development of social conscience, freedom in solidarity, and co-responsibility. From this perspective, educational service involves the promotion of justice.

To make education for young people a place of growth in humanity means to teach them to live some aspect of the Gospel, even when they are not explicitly made aware of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel, their humanity, not their religion, is what distinguishes people. (See the parables of the Samaritan and the grateful leper.) Hence, in education, it is important to help young people discover, appreciate, and assimilate human values, which does not exclude that at the right moment and as far as possible, the person of Christ and his Gospel are explicitly presented to them.

The Spirit granted this charism to De La Salle, who shared it with laypeople before giving it the corporate form of a religious Congregation, whose members probably followed their spiritual intuition because they felt in harmony with this charism and wanted to give their life this Gospel orientation.

To live this charism in reality, it is not enough that lay associates and brothers be excellent leaders or teachers; they must above all be witnesses of Christ in their ministry of education.

In short, the primary component of the charism consists of being impressed particularly with the mystery of Christ in a specific reading of the Gospel. As expressed by the founder, the charism is welcomed by members of the Institute and by laypeople because it is in harmony with their being and expresses what they already live or want to live. The result for the founder, brothers, and laypeople concerned is a special way to refer themselves to Christ and to live their baptism.

Incarnation

“Aware of the human and spiritual distress of the children of the artisans and the poor,” De La Salle embodies **the face of Christ the teacher** by taking on:

- * the conduct of the schools that Adrien Nyel opens,
- * the training and supervision of the schoolmasters who work in them,
- * the invitation to these teachers to come to his home outside of school hours,
- * the housing of the schoolmasters in a place that he rents.

Not content with growing closer to these schoolmasters, De La Salle wishes to share the same living conditions as those to whom he directs his ministry of education, young children suffering various forms of poverty:

- * he moves into a modest house with the schoolmasters;
- * he renounces his appointment as a cathedral canon;
- * he distributes most of his inheritance to victims of famine.

He is no longer merely “for” poor young people but “with” them and “like” them.

John Baptist de La Salle gives substantial form to his charism of education:

- * by engaging with two companions, forever and up to the last one alive, to procure “the establishment of the Christian schools” (1691);
- * by partnering with twelve of his companions to dedicate their lives to the Christian education of poor children (1694);
- * by becoming a member of the Institute he founded (1714).

For the founder and the early brothers, the primary vow represents the expression of the charism and of the finality of the Institute.

For the members of the Institute, the form of life expressed by the Rule determines their way of living the founder’s original intuition, the charism of education. What unites the Brothers of the Christian Schools is not only the faith in Jesus Christ which also unites Christians, but also **the face of Christ the teacher** and its form of incarnation as specified in the Rule. The more alive it is in their consciences, the more it welds the members of the Institute. Moreover, the current text of the Rule reflects a way of actualizing the charism that is not the first, not the last, and not even the only one.

Lay associates welcome and live the total Christian mystery under the specific aspect that the founder made a priority, namely, education, but their way of serving the development of other people has to be in keeping with their particular and secular character. Laypeople can embody the educational service of the poor in new and original ways that are different than those of the brothers and the founder. If they were only to reproduce them, they would risk overvaluing them and devaluing their own forms of actualization, as if they were inferior. It is up to the laity to invent their own “how” to live the Gospel under the aspect of the charism of education. There is no question for them of sharing the institutional form according to which the brothers live the Lasallian charism.

Although brothers and lay Christians alike have a similar spiritual life as a gradual and never-ending transition from dissimilarity with to resemblance of Christ, their spirituality (by which believers develop and express their own spiritual life) reflects their particular state of life. For the brothers, their form of Christian life is specified in the Rule and structured to support the charism of education. For the laity, their entire secular condition, including care of their family, temporal affairs, and social commitments, is in play. Both forms of Christian life, each actualizing the founder's evangelical purpose, are authentic paths of spiritual life.

In short, what is common to founder, brothers, and associates is their focus on perceiving the entire mystery of Christ. What is different is the way in which they provide the structure, whether individually or in groups, to support this specific perception of the totality of the Gospel.

Mission

The mission of the brothers is situated within the Church's mission, which is to continue Christ's mission by extending the Kingdom of Christ to all the earth for the glory of God the Father. Their mission is a way to participate in Christ's mission by means of sign and prophetic witness. Brothers have as their particular vocation the revelation, in a special way and by their entire life, of one facet of the mystery of Christ: his educational role, which becomes evident in the entire Lasallian educational project.

Brothers fulfill this ministry of education "together and by association." They form an essentially fraternal community, a sign of the fraternal communion of all the baptized in Christ that cannot be reduced to a simple means for the apostolate, because community witness is an essential aspect of their principal mission.

The essentially fraternal community of brothers is inseparable from the evangelization of abandoned youth through education, and the vow of association serves to ensure the cohesion of the group in serving the mission. Because of this commitment to mission, a fraternal community becomes a ministerial community. The ministerial dimension in no way diminishes the need for the fraternal dimension but determines the way of living it.

Christian laypeople also participate in the Church's mission. From the beginning, "*the Brothers have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry.*" (Rule, 1987, 17) To accomplish this, however, faith in Christ is indispensable. Moreover, exercising this ministry in accord with the charism of John Baptist de La Salle requires these educators to know the particular aspect of the mystery of Christ that the founder highlighted. Then they can transform their employment into a ministry and live their baptism in the Gospel context of the Lasallian charism. As with every founding charism, the dominant factor is a deep desire of the soul to conform itself with Christ in order to be a witness of a particular aspect of his mystery.

Because this witness is a sign, it can happen, especially in places marked by secularism, that believers embody the educational face of Christ while those around them are unable to perceive it. Living Christian values does not mean imposing them. Recall that a person primarily views the entire gospel in a particular aspect, not to give witness but to conform to Christ.

That lay faithful participate in the Lasallian prophetic mission does not necessarily imply that they collaborate in the works of the Institute. The most important thing they do is to manifest, within their own secular sphere that characterizes them, the gospel presence that is the Institute's fulcrum. They are not forbidden to engage in pastoral work, of course, but they must not shirk their responsibilities in the world of politics, economics, society, thought, arts, and so forth. Their fundamental task is the "reappraisal of secular reality from a theological perspective." They are called to incarnate and to manifest in their milieu the particular image of God that John Baptist de La Salle emphasized. Upon welcoming this image as the gift of the Spirit, they deepen their understanding, and it becomes their spiritual guideline.

Convinced that other educators might be attracted to this original way of being a Christian, they view it as a legacy to transmit. They also believe that their testimony is especially valuable, because it occurs in a secular milieu and in readily understood language.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness that is the subject here concerns the life and the mission of the Church. What is significant is the impact of the witness on the growth of the Church. This witness is all the stronger because it takes appropriate forms in harmony with environment, language, culture, traditions, expectations, challenges, and other factors. This effectiveness constitutes the culmination of the charism, whose purpose is the upbuilding of the Church.

6. DEFINITION OF ASSOCIATE

(This extract from the conference of Father Lucien Boisvert to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Richelieu, Québec, April 2005, includes references to Antonio Botana, FSC, *Lasallian Association: The Ongoing Story*, MEL Bulletin 2, Rome, 2003.)

In our cultural milieu, the word *associated* reflects diverse realities. When viewed in relation to the charism of an Institute, it is normal to want to specify its meaning. This is precisely what I shall try to do in developing a definition of the associate in the strict sense of the word. This is a first effort; it is up to you to evaluate and to adjust it.

The associate is *a person who makes a commitment to live in communion with others the components of the founding charism in an officially recognized manner*. This definition seems to me to reflect what each of you experiences as an associate with other members of the Institute. You are committed to following Christ, the priority being his image as *teacher*, in a religious Institute whose form of life involves fraternal community, a specific mission, and the vow of association and which Church authority has officially recognized. But, aside from you who are individuals, whether as individuals or in groups, whom can we describe as associates in the strict sense of the word? To determine this, I am going to refer to the components that I consider essential for every charism in consecrated life: vision, incarnation, mission, and effectiveness. Then I shall add a few lines on the necessity of making a commitment.

Vision — What I call vision is the perception of the totality of the mystery of Christ in one of its many aspects, in this case that of teacher, along with the person's orientation to the Christian life along this gospel line, all of which supposes that the person is baptized, believes in Christ, and accepts his gospel. Because this is a central, unavoidable requirement, people who have not been baptized or do not believe in Christ are not counted among the associates, regardless of their human qualities and the depth of their personal beliefs. Similarly, baptized people who live the Christian mystery by focusing on another facet of Christ than that of teacher, even if they work in the field of education, do not meet this first requirement to be associated.

Incarnation — It is a matter of forming a body with others in the image of Christ as *teacher*. This is what you do as Brothers of the Christian Schools through your life format that is completely directed to the human and Christian education of young people who are poor. The faithful do the same thing who choose this particular direction in life and apply it in collaboration with Lasallian educational projects. The same is true for members of certain groups who practice this gospel orientation by working together, in communion and solidarity, on educational projects and services. The forms given to the image of Christ the *teacher* can be quite different, but they all refer to the gospel aspect that Jean Baptist de La Salle favored, which is their common denominator.

On the other hand, people who share educational tasks with you or who occasionally or systematically participate in certain aspects of your community life do not become associates by that fact alone. They can work and pray with you without sharing and putting into practice your gospel vision. They do not orient their Christian life to understanding the founding charism. The same goes for groups whose members unite to collaborate in the work of education but have not chosen to live their baptism in relation to the Lasallian charism. This is the situation for most members of the educational community. They are not perceived as associates. They are designated by words such as *colleagues*, *partners*, *volunteers*. There are also other people or groups in a special relationship with the Institute without being associates.

Mission — As its immediate objective, the mission of the Institute founded by De La Salle focuses on the human and Christian education of young people who are poor, but this mission is not limited to creating and maintaining institutions and educational projects. As its main objective and priority, the mission includes the manifestation of Christ viewed as *teacher*. We have observed that men and women religious, according to Vatican II, have a special vocation to reveal in a particular way one or other aspect of the mystery of Christ. Their primary mission in the Church and in the world is in the order of sign and prophetic witness. Given that this mission is an essential component of the founding charism, only people who throughout their entire life manifest Christ in the aspect favored by John Baptist de La Salle are, or ought to be, considered as associates.

Brothers of the Christian Schools, by their type of living that is integrally oriented to education through their educational institutions and projects, are a particular expression of Christ's concern that people *grow* and *develop*, especially those who are poor. Also witnessing to Christ the *teacher* are those individuals and group members who demonstrate this aspect of the mystery of Christ by focusing their entire Christian life on education.

On the other hand, many Christians, as well as non-Christians, participate in the Lasallian educational project without manifesting in their life and their behavior in a particular way the aspect of Christ to which De La Salle gave priority.

The list of associates does not include people who might be excellent educators and witnesses of human and Christian values but do not orient their life to the gospel's approach to education, either because they are not baptized or because they focus their life on another aspect of the gospel.

Effectiveness — According to *Vita Consecrata*, “the manifold charisms of their respective Institutes are granted by the Holy Spirit for the good of the entire Mystical Body, whose upbuilding they must serve” (47A). Their goal is to build the Church in its dimensions of mystery, communion, and mission. If they lack this effectiveness, they lose their *raison d'être*. Although it is impossible to assess accurately the effectiveness of a charism, many of the effects being invisible, we can, however, see that John Baptist de La Salle and the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools have had, and still have, a significant impact in the Church and in the world, particularly in the domain of education. Through the influence of their fraternity and their works for poor people, they have testified and continue to bear witness to Christ the *teacher*. The same is true for other faithful who in their environment and according to various modalities live in their situation as disciples of Jesus Christ by focusing on education. They participate in the effectiveness of the Lasallian charism.

Commitment — In the first formula of association documented in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the commitment consists of “uniting myself and remaining in society with the brothers.” The wording directly relates not to the work of the schools but to “the community for the schools for the poor.” (Botana, p. 23) Although different than the vow required of the brothers, some form of commitment is required of people who wish to become *associates*, including an orientation of life in accord with the meaning of the Lasallian charism. When introduced in this new kind of association, the commitment includes solidarity, interdependence, and co-responsibility for the common mission. *There is no association without some external commitment among the associates* (ibid., p. 40). Even when it takes various forms, the commitment must always translate, in communion with others, the gospel inspiration of the founding person for the benefit of the education of young people who are poor.

New Association — I suppose that association is called new because it differs from the one that includes only Brothers of the Christian Schools, which qualifies it as being the first. The question is to know who is a member of this new association. Brothers are certainly part of it, but who else? It seems to me that only individuals, whether individually or in a group, are recognized as associates in the strict sense of the term. This includes, therefore, those baptized persons who orient their Christian life according to the gospel emphasis chosen by De La Salle and also link themselves with other associates to realize the educational service of the poor. What we have seen involves more than sharing tasks and participating in community life and spirituality. Integration with Lasallian identity through their appropriation of the essential components of the founding charism is required.

The new association, therefore, would consist of people who are associated individually with the Institute, but also groups of associates whose members are secular, consecrated, or clerical. All of these people ought to have as common characteristics and references the essential elements of the Lasallian charism, even if they embody and manifest them in different and complementary ways. This charism is the foundation on which to build the Lasallian identity.

The new association, therefore, might include individual associates, congregations of Lasallian sisters, laypeople organized in private or public associations of the faithful, and so on, which would require a structure that is different than the Institute's traditional form. Such a structure ought to respect the internal autonomy of each group, which serves as a sign and a means of mutual communion. In this communion, no group would be a universal model or in a position of superiority; none would hold hierarchical power over others. Together, in fraternal equality and solidarity, they would look in the same direction and serve the same mission. Constituted by groups in communion with one another, association would be, in its own way, an image and a realization of the Church communion. In this dimension of the Church, according to *Christifideles laici*, “communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion” (32D). Let us consider in addition that the mission will disappear along with the pilgrim Church, while communion will endure in the definitive Kingdom.

7. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF ASSOCIATION

(Excerpts from Antonio Botana, FSC, *Lasallian Association: The Ongoing Story*, MEL Bulletin 2, Rome, 2003. This English translation of MEL 2 can be found at http://www.lasalle.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/mel/cahier_mel/02cahier_mel_en.pdf. MEL Bulletin 2 is worth reading in its entirety.)

This integration within a collective identity brings with it a commitment to continue the story line along the same imaginative lines. It means joining an “unending story.”

In this way narrative identity expands the narrow horizons of the immediate experience and makes the person feel that he is part of a much broader story, in which his short story finds meaning and understanding. And if faith is the objective, then it will be discovered within a salvation history that goes beyond the temporal and geographical boundaries of specific circumstances.

- The feeling of belonging is enriched with the dimension of **communion**: the person perceives himself as being united to other persons in the same spirit or charism, and this goes beyond friendliness and even being close to a person.
- The feeling of responsibility with regard to finality or mission is also enriched when the persons discover themselves to be **instruments in God's work**, and when they discover that this work is not limited to the specific program that they have in hand here and now.
- And John Baptist de La Salle is considered to be a **teacher of life and spirituality**, and not merely a symbol of unity.

The “*initial myth*” or founding story that gave rise to the Lasallian collective identity has exceptional importance on this narrative level. The formation process will help each person to relive the “*initial myth*” (the founding story) and enable him to tell his own story as an updated version of that myth. By reliving and updating this initial myth, each new associate will acquire the *identity* proper to the Lasallian community, and he will identify with the Lasallian charism and will be able to enrich it with his own personal charism. (MEL 2 English, pp. 12–13)

In a process of Lasallian formation, people must be able to experience these dimensions in greater or lesser intensity. There are many possibilities:

- Being associated, *in communion*, with specific persons for mission and not simply working in an organized team or in an organized way.
- Being devoted, based on gratuity, to the poor, and not simply to the young.
- Having shared *the experience and the encounter with God*, the feeling of being consecrated, deep feelings about ministry, and not simply having prayed together with other persons.
- Having discerned life in light of the Spirit, feeling accompanied based on Association in the overall search for the will of God, having been able to build the narration of one's own identity in dialogue with one who accompanies and who acts as mediator of the collective identity. (MEL 2 English, p. 14)

The Lasallian collective identity comes to us as a pluriform identity. We can talk about diverse Lasallian identities and no longer just about the identity of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.... (MEL 2 English, p. 15)

In other words, there no longer exists the Brother of the Christian Schools as a pure and exclusive identity, *but the Brother of the Christian Schools in the context of a multi-Lasallian identity*. Of course we could easily reverse these affirmations in order to apply them to the Lasallian identity for laypeople. (MEL 2 English, p. 16)

This *contextual* dimension of identity has been highlighted in recent times, and it is an important challenge for formation. It places identity within present history, in a concrete culture but, above all, in a context of interpersonal ties that reveal their interdependence, their complementarity and significance. (MEL 2 English, pp. 16–17)

The scope of this contextual dimension of identity on the ecclesial level is recent. It will suffice for us to read carefully the following text from John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici*. He makes some statements that we would have found difficult to accept not many years ago, but are we capable of re-reading this, accepting its consequences, applying it just like that to “Lasallian Association,” to the collective Lasallian identity, where there is a common charism in service of the one mission, all within different modes of the Lasallian vocation? (MEL 2 English, p. 17)

In Church-Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service. (*Christifideles Laici*, 55).

8. HISTORY OF ASSOCIATION IN THE DISTRICT OF FRANCOPHONE CANADA

Association has a long history in the District of Francophone Canada. For our District, as for the entire Institute, association is found to be the culmination of a long process. The main point of departure for this development is, without any doubt, the focus on **the shared mission** in the 1980s and the insertion of the shared mission in the 1987 Rule (Article 17). The two main phases of our journey are **partnership** (1993 General Chapter) and **association** (2000 General Chapter).

The shared Lasallian mission

In our District, our approach to association with laypeople centered from the beginning on the Lasallian educational mission. Certain circumstances, the absence of new recruits, and the aging of our brothers led us to associate more laypeople — teachers, pastoral animators, and so on — who are employed in our works and already share our Lasallian goals and values.

First step (1994–2000): Lasallian partnership

The 42nd General Chapter (1993) stated that the shared Lasallian mission would be achieved through Lasallian partnership and that it ought to be viewed as a sign of our time. Our District received this option from the Institute eagerly. The first step proposed by the General Chapter was to work on the formation of our partners. As a first step, our District wanted to proceed to an evaluation of our works; within this framework, the theme of the shared mission was the subject of meetings held to share information.

Partner formation became a major concern in 1995 when the proposal to participate in a French session on shared mission in France was studied and accepted. A formation and information session on the shared Lasallian mission was organized for instructors at the Notre-Dame de la Rouge Center in Calumet. At the District Chapter in June 1996, partners joined the capitulants for a day of exchange on the Lasallian mission and Lasallian partnership. In July of the same year, brothers and laypeople from Québec and Haiti participated in the International Francophone Session in Quimper on the shared Lasallian mission. Communities were invited to provide in their community project for 1996–97 actions adapted to their milieu and the people. The Québec delegates who made the Quimper session met in November to take stock of projects after Quimper, in particular, the creation of Lasallian teams. Articles on the shared Lasallian mission were submitted for collective reflection through the District magazine, *Lasallian Reflections*. A committee of partners in mission was created in December 1998 and held several meetings in 1999 and 2000. Among other activities in the context of the formation of brothers and lay partners, delegates participated in the session at Saint-Brieuc, and two Lasallian formation sessions were held at Pointe-du-Lac, the first in June and the second in November 2000.

Second step (2000–2005): association for the educational service of the poor

The 43rd General Chapter (2000) launches a major stage in choosing the central theme, “Associated for the Educational Service of the Poor as the Lasallian Response to the Challenges of the 21st Century.” With respect to association, the 43rd General Chapter formulates five recommendations and 11 propositions that eloquently highlight the significance of association. The formation of brothers and of partners ranks first in importance.

Our District, while continuing the work already done and paying attention to all the recommendations and proposals of the Chapter, decides to give particular attention to Proposition 2: **“That Regions, Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations create discussion forums to consider how we can share the Lasallian charism with educators and young people of other religions.”** In 2001, our District establishes a Committee on Lasallian Educational Mission and Association (MEL/AS) with the mandate **to favor and to support the process of developing association for the educational service of the poor** (Letter of August 30, 2001, by Brother Louis-Paul Lavallée). The Committee is composed of nine members: three brothers and six laypeople. The main lines of reflection entrusted to this group point the way explicitly:

- Reinvigorate reflection on fundamental aspects of association (meaning, motives, impacts, types, history, formation).
- Develop “new and bold” projects related to association (support for formation, aid to local teams, joint meetings of local groups).
- Focus these projects on a proposition in faith for the educational service of the poorest people, on the rights of the child, and on the status of women and of families (in our schools and in our works, moving from teaching to proposing in faith, becoming aware of situations of injustice, including the commitment, if necessary, to correct them and to promote the rights of the child).
- Enter into dialogue with all our partners and all the brothers in their workplaces and/or their communities (exchanges, visits, newsletters).

In effect, the mandate given to the Committee (MEL/AS) was wide ranging. Between October 20–21, 2001, and December 9, 2003, it held fourteen meetings and reflected on multiple topics, including organization of Lasallian teams, foundations of association, modalities of association, formulas of commitment, criteria to define an associate, Lasallian school, Lasallian charism, characteristics of Lasallian works, Lasallian formation, and social justice. The Committee developed a number of projects.

The Committee organized several Lasallian formation sessions: one, at Pointe-du-Lac, on Lasallian spirituality; another, at Mont-Bénilde secondary school, on Lasallian pedagogy, and a third on the same subject, at Camp De La Salle. It also held a forum on social justice and prepared an issue of *Lasallian Reflections* on the theme, “Educating for Justice.”

District Chapter, 2004: Committee on Association (COMAS)

Our 2004 District Chapter proposed an additional step in establishing association by implementing Proposition 5 of the 43rd General Chapter (2000): **“In Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations, the Brothers and their Associates create, where it does not exist, or further develop a structure responsible for the Lasallian educational mission in which all participate with deliberative voice.”** To follow up, our District Chapter approved two propositions: Proposition 5, creating the Committee on the Lasallian Educational Mission (COMEL), and Proposition 6, creating the Committee on Association (COMAS). The choice of this double structure was not aimed at separating mission and association, but rather at marking the importance that we wanted to give to association. The main objective of the District capitulants was to be able to “examine together ways of deepening the Lasallian charism and inventing new avenues of collaboration and association for the mission.” In addition, the capitulants proposed “to support groups of Lasallian laypeople, including young Lasallians,” one goal being to enable Lasallian laypeople to develop “a sense of belonging to the Lasallian mission and of being a fraternal communion of quality.”

The Brother Visitor and his Council established the mandate of COMAS in the perspective defined by our District Chapter:

- plan and organize, in connection with COMEL, a program adapted for Lasallian formation (pedagogical, theological, spiritual) for the associates of the District, both brothers and laypeople;
- plan and organize the commitment ritual of future associates;
- suggest to District authorities the modalities of membership of the associates in the Lasallian mission;
- plan and organize periodically, in various ways, festive and prayerful gatherings with the families of the associates and the brothers.

2005: Year of Association in the Institute

An important step was taken in 2005, the Year of Association in the Institute. Fourteen people, including one priest and six young people, made a formal and official commitment to our mission in the works of our District.

9. LASALLIAN FORMATION FOR THE MISSION

Since the 1993 General Chapter, an explicit need for formation of the laity has become apparent. In French-speaking Canada in subsequent years, a few projects and attempts were put in place to respond without being a matter of a veritable formation program. During the intercapitular period (1993–2000), a dialogue was initiated between the community and the laity to find concrete solutions to this need. In the first place, it was necessary to identify the characteristics of the Lasallian spirit and, secondly, to deal with any hesitation about any of them.

The District Chapter of February 2004 marks a turning point in this area as it sets up two joint committees, Committee on Association (COMAS) and Committee on the Lasallian Educational Mission (COMEL.) One role of COMAS is to create an adapted program of Lasallian formation for the associates of the District, both brothers and laypeople, particularly with the support of a university or an institute.

The formation project for associates must provide continuity, development, and a relish for expansion. It is not and should not become mere transmission of knowledge. These characteristics require the formation to take young adults especially into account. It needs not only to raise their awareness but also to generate their genuine interest, an enthusiasm that could lead them to take active steps.

Our goal is to ensure the continuity of the Lasallian spirit within our works and also to lead by creative means to establish new projects. This only becomes feasible if we, brothers and laity, instill through association a common spirit of belonging.

Along with the enthusiasm that colors these words, there are some attenuating sociological and structural realities.

The first is the fear that individuals have of commitment or of abandoning it. Gilles Lipovetsky's (1987) research on values in post-contemporary societies reminds us that we are immersed in the cult of the ephemeral. Few things today serve to strengthen the individual for a long-term commitment; the declining marriage and birth rates might bear witness to this. Many young people today prefer a periodic to a continuous commitment. Even when it is periodic, they are fearful of sectarianism.

Second, we know here in Québec, according to *Recherche-action sur les itinéraires de croyance des jeunes*, by Gilles Routhier, that young people are living in massive religious indifference that is deeply rooted in abysmal ignorance. This makes it necessary, therefore, to teach or to relearn everything.

If these first two considerations describe the absence of the religious dimension in our collective mentality, the next two serve to identify the realities of our District.

Third, the diversity of educational works and in the profiles of the people who work in them does not make the task of organizing formation sessions any easier. There are and always will be absentees. The concern is that there not be too many.

Fourth is the aging of the community. Time is running out, since the average age of the District is 78, and we are just at the beginning of a structured formation program.

We recently set up an ad hoc committee on formation within COMAS. Our recommendation was to propose a program with the following four dimensions: anthropological, professional, Christian, and Lasallian. To ensure their success, **we would suggest that the formation focus on growing in the love of Christ and on making a commitment to young people.** To achieve this result, this formation **will need to function in two stages:**

Basic formation will be offered for young leaders and new Lasallians and conducted in a homogeneous group. It will be organized as a compact block during preseason camps or teacher days. This formation will aim *to raise the awareness of participants about the Lasallian approach to the topic.*

Continuing formation for Lasallian brothers, associates, and colleagues will follow the approach of university courses; each program has units representing the selected intellectual aspects and including optional courses. This formation will aim *to fulfill the Christian life through its Lasallian dimension, mastery of the knowledge favoring a commitment as an associate, and re-reading the person's commitment with young people.*

10. COMMITMENT TO ASSOCIATION

1. The commitment to association can result from two sources:

a. The Brother Visitor, after conducting consultations, can invite to associate for the Lasallian educational mission those persons who:

- make their own the Lasallian project of human and Christian education that is particularly aimed at the young and the poor;
- are committed or are ready to make a concrete commitment to implement this educational project in a particular place as a member of an educational team;
- participate in formation sessions to perfect their knowledge of the founder, the Institute, and the Lasallian charism. (Resolutions No. 3 and No. 4 of the District Chapter, February 2004)

b. Anyone who meets these criteria can send to the Brother Visitor a personal request to become an associate. (Resolution No. 3)

2. In the formula of commitment, the associate:

- a. expresses the will to live the following of Christ according to the charism of De La Salle in association with the Brothers of the Christian Schools;
- b. specifies this commitment with respect to the Lasallian educational project;
- c. recognizes that this commitment is situated only within the framework of the Lasallian MISSION for the educational service of the poor;
- d. expresses the intention to learn about the resources of Lasallian pedagogy and spirituality;
- e. indicates the duration of the commitment (one, two, or three years).

11. MODEL OF THE COMMITMENT FORMULA

As a faithful follower of Christ in the Church and of John Baptist de La Salle, who founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, I wish to announce publicly my statement of commitment that will officially designate me as an associate.

For this purpose, I promise to “live in association” with the Brothers of the Christian Schools of the District of Francophone Canada for the Lasallian educational mission with and for young people, especially those who are most disadvantaged.

With the grace of God and the fraternal support of associates, brothers, and laypeople, **I commit myself** to the work that I have chosen or that I have been offered:

- to announce Jesus Christ explicitly;
- to promote, individually and collectively, the educational components of the work;
- to inspire and to perpetuate the Lasallian charism;
- to make Lasallian pedagogy and spirituality my permanent resource.

I recognize that this commitment excludes any canonical, legal, and financial links.

In complete freedom and with full knowledge, I commit myself for a period of year(s).

Specific additional clauses of the associate:

In faith whereof, I have signed at _____, this ____ day of _____ in the year _____.

(signed)

Associate

Brother Visitor or his delegate

12. MODEL OF THE COMMITMENT RITUAL

Once agreed upon, the ritual can be conducted at a Lasallian gathering, organized either by the District or by an educational team, on the date of a Lasallian feast, at the beginning of the school year or of the particular project, or on any other occasion suitable for such an event.

The ceremony might include the following elements:

PRESENTATION of the ritual (specifying its significance and objectives)

1. Initial moment of interior recollection aided by:

- reading of the Word of God or liturgical chant;
- simple decoration, such as paschal candle and official register.

Another suggestion:

Associate(s) and other principal participants might have a small candle in hand during the proclamation of the commitment formula.

2. Reading of the commitment formula

When the reading is finished, the associate gives the document to the Brother Visitor, and the document is then deposited in the register provided for this purpose.

3. A word from the Brother Visitor or his delegate

4. Presentation of a Lasallian memento to each associate

Examples:

- A copy of the Bible or the Gospel
- The woodcarving of De La Salle's face
- A medallion with the effigy of De La Salle
- An icon of De La Salle

5. Light refreshments or a meal

(Document courtesy of Frère Florent Gaudreault, FSC, Visitor of the District of Francophone Canada. Brother Paul Grass, FSC, translated the French text.)