

Circular # 461

Associated for the Lasallian Mission...and act of HOPE.

Introduction

So they went out, got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus, was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not recognize Him. Jesus said to them,

“Children, have you caught anything to eat?” They answered him, “No.” So He said, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. (John 21: 3-6)

Association has existed since the origins of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, but has developed in an altogether unprecedented way during the past forty years. The foundation event

which links the Institute today to its origins is that of June 6th 1694, when John Baptist de La Salle and twelve of his followers came together to consecrate themselves for life, to the Christian

education of poor boys. The link between this foundation act of association and the growing interest in association in the Institute today can be clearly seen. (43rd General Chapter, 2000, Lasallian Association, p. 2)

Dear Brothers and All Who Serve the Lasallian Mission

I.1. As the Superior General and the General Council of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, we take this opportunity to greet you in the name of our God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle, our Founder and universal patron of Christian educators. After centuries of communal life rooted in stability in the Institute and after decades of renewal in fidelity to our founding charism, we find ourselves now in 2010 living a time of both personal and institutional transition and transformation. These are indeed exciting times...times that invite us once again to a faith-filled act of HOPE in our collective future!

I.2. In the gospel, the risen Lord calls his disciples to a new future. Lost and uncertain about what to do, they decide to return to their former lives as fishermen. But as is often the case, Christ interrupts their routine to renew their call to follow him. Despite all that he had taught them before, they still needed to learn more. We might apply a modern lens to his invitation and call it a mandate for continuing formation. As Lasallians we too are called to cast our nets over the “right side of the boat” and not to return to our former “lives” ...lives that afforded us the comfort of the “known.” No, Christ is now “interrupting” our Lasallian journey with a new mandate to explore roads untraveled in faith and zeal.

I.3. And so we believe that the time has come to write to you about what it means in today’s world to serve “together and by association” in the Lasallian educational mission of providing

a human and Christian education to the young, especially those who are poor. We also are writing in response to the call from the 44th General Chapter to take the initiative to construct a possible model of the Lasallian Family.¹ Many insightful Lasallians who have examined this topic in the past and many current studies, surveys, and reflections have influenced this circular, which we clearly state is neither exhaustive nor the final word on the topic of association. This circular is not intended to be normative nor intended to silence new research or experiences. We chose not to curtail but rather to fan into flame the work of the Spirit as new forms of association emerge and develop. We hope that this circular will motivate and inspire you to greater faith *in* and zeal *for* the Lasallian educational mission.

I.4. After a recent visit in the PARC Region to a small island named Buka – an autonomous sector of Papua New Guinea – one of the Brothers recounted this wonderful story of Lasallian commitment in association.

I.5. *Recent graduates of our De La Salle Teacher Training College in Mount Hagen had gathered in Buka to begin their teaching careers. Accompanied by their guide and experienced Lasallian teacher, Donald, and carrying all of their teaching essentials on their backs, they began their journey. Half way up the steep jungle path, one of the young teachers began to cry and pleaded, “This is much too hard. I can’t go on!” Donald responded, “Stop your crying! You are a Lasallian teacher. Don’t you know you must climb up the mountain to reach the children?”*

I.6. Each of us in his or her unique way knows the experience of climbing up the mountain to “reach the children.” Bonhoeffer might call it the cost of discipleship. Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens put it this way. *Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true.*² Both capture the passion and the commitment of what we call the Lasallian Charism. Both invite us to be dauntless bearers of hope in the world of education as we journey together in this 21st century.

I.7. Association is a fundamental trait of the Lasallian charism. **In this circular we highlight the essential aspects of Lasallian association by examining its lived reality, defining its relevant terms, and discerning its guidelines.** We discuss various ways to advance the concept of association locally, regionally, and globally. We conclude by examining what it means to say, “I am associated with the Lasallian mission. I belong to the Lasallian Family,” and provide some concrete recommendations for consideration. We believe that a comprehensive look at the make-up of the Lasallian Family will enhance and complement an understanding of association.

I.16. Although we offer no single solution, universal application, or absolute conclusion, we do propose some common guidelines to mark the path that Lasallians will take during the next phase of the Institute’s collective history. We invite you to travel this adventurous journey in faith into the uncharted territory of *tomorrow* while keeping firmly focused on the foundational story that has led the Institute to *today*.

I.17. This is a new moment in our history. It is one that is calling forth a fresh response from each of us. Much like St. Peter's "trance" in the Acts of the Apostles (10: 9-16) when a new "blanket" of possibilities was stretched out before him, and what was unthinkable before was now presented as an inspired path to grow and unite the young Christian community... we also are invited to see that what was true in the past must be nuanced today for the vitality of our Lasallian Mission.

Chapter 1 - Association: A Fundamental Characteristic of the Lasallian Charism

1.1. The dynamic of association, that is, of associating for a common purpose, is an essential component of the Lasallian adventure that appears in the Institute's first decade. The initial group of would-be teachers in 1680 gradually forms a community as Brothers who in turn create the Society of the Christian Schools, which the Church in 1725 approves as the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

1.2. In 1691 and 1694, John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers explicitly proclaim this fundamental element of association: first, in the 1691 "Heroic Vow" of De La Salle, Nicolas Vuyart, and Gabriel Drolin, and then more definitively in the 1694 lifelong commitment of twelve Brothers and De La Salle. The 1694 vow becomes the prototypical expression of apostolic energy and spiritual motivation for every future type of Lasallian association.

Association Today

1.11. Association today plays a central role in Lasallian thought and action. The 43rd and 44th General Chapters, as well as the 2006 Assembly on the Lasallian Educational Mission and Association, stress this priority. As we reflect on this phenomenon, we recognize in today's quite different context the same factors that are present at the origin of the Society of the Christian Schools: (1) crisis/crossroads, and (2) eyes of faith/ hope in the future.

1.14. ...we would like to specifically note the contribution of Lasallian women who now compose over half of the total personnel involved in the Mission. Just as more recently the education of both young men and women became the focus of the Mission so has the participation of women in the Lasallian educational network become essential. Their presence, undoubtedly, will help to construct a more humane and community-centered society; help to reexamine ways of thinking; help to situate the entire Lasallian world a bit differently in history and help to organize social, political, economic and religious life in a way that can be more intuitive and relational. Once again the founding story continues to be lived out anew...continues to move from crisis to crossroads; from discouragement to hope.

Eyes of Faith... Renewed Hope in the future

1.15. The Brothers are experiencing a dilemma in many countries, especially in places affected by the decline of membership in the vowed state of life: whether to abandon institutions by reducing the number of communities and ministries to a select few or to address new educational needs by joining with men and women from all states of life who are dedicated to the Lasallian educational mission.

1.18. Most Lasallians who choose to live their baptismal vocation by participating in the Lasallian ministry of education and evangelization recognized by the Church, are believers in Jesus Christ. However we readily recognize the many sincere women and men of other faith families who center their professional and at times personal lives, on the founding Lasallian story.

Chapter 2 - Fundamental Elements of Lasallian Association

2.1. In this circular we propose five fundamental elements to describe Lasallian association. Other elements undoubtedly exist, but these five are present both in the Institute's founding experience and in its ongoing tradition. The survey of the worldwide Institute conducted by the Secretariat for Lasallian Family and Association (2009) has documented a great variety of experiences and perspectives in association. The five fundamental elements that follow identify the experience of Lasallian association and promote unity in the ongoing, dynamic process of association across the Institute's Districts and Regions. New adaptations and experiences will continue to enrich these five fundamental elements. These elements are a rephrasing, for purposes of amplification and clarification, of those found in the Documents of the 43rd General Chapter of 2000 and cited in Chapter 4 of this Circular.

1. Association exists for the mission. 2. Association implies being a member of a community for the mission. 3. Association results from experience and is a dynamic journey, not an acquired status. 4. Association stems from faith, vocation, and state of life. 5. Association presupposes a freely made commitment.

2.2.1. The immediate and ultimate goal of all Lasallian association is our educational mission. There is no point in talking about association unless the discussion focuses on this mission. These reciprocal and dynamic realities of association and mission make explicit the Lasallian approach to faith, service and community.

2.3. *Association implies being a member of a community for the mission.*

2.3.1. Lasallians, by their very presence in the mission, bring personal and communal life experiences to their service in association. Their own experience of community relationships is a significant part of the vital role they play in the lives of the young. For it is these young people who recognize in them not only their professional expertise but recognize even more their experience of God, their ethical behavior and their ability to foster healthy supportive relationships.

2.3.2. Lasallian educational centers must be places where welcome, peace and respect are lived out in communities characterized by the acceptance of each human person. They must be places where cultural diversity is not an occasion for conflict, exclusion, or destructive tension but rather where being different is an enriching component of community life. In so doing these centers incarnate what “together” means in “together and by association.”

2.4. *Association results from experience and is a dynamic journey, not an acquired status.*

2.4.1. It is crucial that Lasallian association be seen as a vocational response to the God who calls. It is a “yes” to that invitation that forms the basis of all Lasallian commitment. It is

a progressive conversion. The journey that begins with cordial and skilled participation in the mission can move to a freely chosen personal commitment that leads to service as a leader in a Lasallian ministry. Having said that, let it further be clear that association is a gift given and not a status attained.

2.5.4. The Institute invites all Lasallians to renew daily their experience of God. As the Founder explains in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat: It is your duty to go up to God every day in prayer to learn from him all that you must teach the children and then to come down to them by accommodating them at their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated*

*for them to you.*¹⁸ Like Donald declared earlier in the story from Papua New Guinea, “Don’t you know you must climb up the mountain to reach the children?”

2.6.1. Association also implies a process – a spiritual path that takes one where he or she might never have chosen to go. This graced journey is evident in De La Salle’s own words, *God who conducts all things with wisdom and gentleness...wishing to draw me into undertaking entirely the care of the schools, has done so in a quiet imperceptible way...so that one commitment lead me into another without my having foreseen it in the beginning.*¹⁹

2.7. Contemporary culture exercises a strong influence on the ideals that traditionally have inspired religious movements, including the consecrated life. The ideal of a lifelong commitment is perhaps one of the most challenged and affected concepts; nevertheless, any commitment to Lasallian association implies a definite length of time that will vary according to the person’s circumstances and state of life. The implications for the community and the mission, however,

require that the commitment to association be for a defined period of time. History reveals that Brothers and all other Lasallians have committed themselves some for now and some forever to

Christ’s mission in the Church as entrusted to the Institute. Now, more than ever before, the call goes out to all Lasallians to ensure the future of the Mission.

Chapter 3 - Lasallian Association: Common Characteristics Experienced in Different WaysA multicultural, multireligious reality

3.1. The original experience of *together and by association* that begins with John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers now continues in eighty countries on five continents. The Lasallian charism appears to have a new dynamism because of its presence in a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious settings. Educators throughout the world find in De La Salle and the Lasallian educational mission an inspiring element to integrate into their daily lives.

3.2. This new reality of Lasallian association in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and global context has common elements, even though Lasallians experience them in different ways. Two universal concepts however are essential: the relevance of human nature and the value of education.

3.3. The anthropological view of human nature that motivates Lasallians recognizes and dignifies every human being as being unique, unrepeatable, and educable. Discrimination based on gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation or political affiliation has no place in the Lasallian educational mission. As social beings, humans are capable of establishing meaningful relationships. As spiritual beings, they are open to transcendent reality and the search for life's meaning. This holistic view of human nature includes intellectual, emotional, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

3.4. Lasallians recognize that each person can and needs to be formed in a holistic way. Inspired by the Founder's writings and experience and by the living tradition of the Institute, Lasallians regard education as a process of integral human formation. They recognize human dignity in the face of everyone they meet. In keeping with the Lasallian tradition, they devote themselves especially to the education of young people who are in difficult and challenging circumstances.

The Association Story of Lay Lasallians

3.10. The story of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in association has a long history and tradition. The same is not true for others who are now also involved in Lasallian educational ministry. Their movement toward association has been gradually developing. At the present time, no universal model or system of association exists for colleagues in Lasallian educational ministries. What does exist is a kaleidoscope of experiences lived out in various countries and cultures pointing to new directions for the future. These experiences appear in two complementary global contexts: Christian and multi-religious. New forms of communion and of participation in the Lasallian charism are emerging in both contexts.

3.11. From the Christian perspective, the desire of many colleagues in Lasallian ministries to participate in the charism of the Institute is one of the most significant trends in recent times. This longing for charismatic communion and sharing is fostering a dynamic movement in the Institute. The challenge and the opportunity for the Lasallian charism is clear. The challenge is to find ways to appreciate, acknowledge, and perhaps give form to this action of the Spirit. The opportunity is to identify and expand in the future this new

and significant presence of the Lasallian charism in the world of the young, especially the poor.

3.13. The 43rd Chapter also urges the Institute to take into account the situation of the women and men who participate in the Lasallian mission but do not share the Christian faith. “We should note that in the composition of these groups one can meet Brothers, other Christians, members of other religions, and persons of goodwill whose point of reference, as the 42nd General Chapter indicates, is *the human and spiritual values recognized and pursued by all Lasallians (meditation, service of the poor, the family, the rights of children)*.²⁶ Let it be stated clearly and unambiguously that calling oneself Lasallian is not relegated only to those of the Christian faith.

Many faith-filled people professing other creeds participate daily in the Lasallian educational Mission. They are a valued part of this community.

3.14. In turn the goal, in those places where Lasallians minister in a multi-religious context, needs to be the deepening of faith in each student. It is our hope that students of all religions would graduate from our Lasallian schools professing their beliefs more faithfully and be committed to the construction of a better world.

Chapter 4 - The Need for Discernment

4.7. We do not wish to cover the same ground as other excellent works in existence.²⁹ Therefore we will not propose a glossary of Lasallian terms in this document. We prefer to amplify in this chapter on discernment the meaning of association since it is central to the current discussion.

4.9. In the Lasallian tradition, the term “association” has a mystical connotation that goes beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Saint John Baptist De La Salle, association was a fundamental intuition that allowed him to respond with apostolic zeal to God’s salvific plan for the young, especially the poor. When they associated together, the first Brothers experienced through their lived history that their lives were irrevocably united by the incarnation of this Trinitarian call. That is why for all Lasallians today, the “together and by association” element of our origins, continues to have a strong and deep meaning.

4.10. Given this perspective, the term “association” should not be understood in a legal or canonical sense. It represents the link that unites all those committed to the Lasallian Mission, i.e. those who see themselves responsible for it and who contribute to its vitality. This link can be expressed in diverse ways:

- For the Brothers, it is a vow that forms part of their religious profession.
- Some Lay Lasallians will choose to express it publicly after a process and according to the customs of their District.
- Other Lay Lasallians will live it out implicitly through their commitment in the Lasallian Mission lived according to the characteristics described in this Circular. They are associates *de facto*.

4.10.4. Association has never been an end in itself. It is “for the mission”; with the clear purpose of giving a human and Christian education to *“the children of the artisans and the poor.”*

4.12. However, being considered and described as an *associated Lasallian* involves some form of recognition, expressed in a variety of ways, such as a specific link with the District structures, a close relationship with a community of Brothers or other Lasallians, regular participation in Lasallian meetings and formation sessions, or participating in discernment and decision-making groups (such as a Lasallian Educational Mission Assembly or Council).

Criteria for discernment

4.17. Evaluating these initiatives, some of them temporary or limited in scope, while others are long-lasting and extensive, requires principles on which to base the discernment. Some criteria come from experience; others stem from an understanding of the Lasallian charism. Thus, posing the question, “Who is in?” or “Who is out?” of Lasallian association does not further the discussion any; just as vagueness or indifference risks relativizing the vocational call. The invitation to belong is ever-present and all inclusive. We do not want to marginalize nor create classes of Lasallians. Rather, our goal is to continue motivating, forming and inviting all members to deepen their association for Mission.

4.18. To say that *everyone* who is Lasallian is an associate is incorrect. Not everyone is an associate just as not everyone is a Brother. Along with the Brothers, those who *are* associates are more connected to the Institute’s structures for Mission and can help assure its stability and continuation.

4.21. It is important to remember that this discernment of Lasallian association takes place in the lives of real people. Each of us can recognize a Lasallian when we see one in service of the young. However necessary the proposal of written criteria, the real proof is in the actual personal encounter. The following quote from a dedicated Lasallian associate bears witness to this sincere vocational discernment for mission. *“I am Lasallian. I am Lasallian 24 hours a day – in my work, with my family, when I pray. The values I hold, the person I try to be, the work I do and the relationships I have are all lived within this context. Being Lasallian is where I find God and it is where I am called to try and live as faithfully as I can the values of the gospel.”* (PARC Region)

Chapter 5 - The Lasallian Family

Definition

5.6. First appearing in the documents of the General Chapter of 1976³⁵, the term Lasallian Family has since taken on a variety of interpretations. For the purpose of this discussion we choose to employ the definition given by the 42nd General Chapter in 1993. *The Lasallian Family designates all those who participate in the Lasallian educational enterprise, especially*

*those who are moving toward a sharing of the spirit and the mission of St. John Baptist de La Salle.*³⁶ It is clear that the definition allows for great flexibility in the way a person belongs to the family. It is all inclusive by allowing for levels of depth ranging from profound to cursory. The word “especially” is significant in the definition. It refers to a more specific group who sees its belonging to the family as a process...a journey. As in the case of membership in any family, there may be an ebb and flow to this process. Belonging is never static. It presumes movement in the areas of personal, relational, intellectual and spiritual growth, all of which affect one’s incorporation into the family.

5.22. We wish to emphasize that participation in the Lasallian Family *must* contribute to the building up of one’s own family and/or community life. It should *never* be seen as a hindrance or as an obstacle to family unity...much less put family life “at risk.” Those, whose vocation calls them to marriage, and perhaps parenthood, are to celebrate the fact that their primary community is their family. Belonging to the Lasallian Family should be a source of strength and balance that nourishes all Lasallian vocations.

Chapter 6 - Fostering Association

6.3. The International Assembly of 2006 reminds us that giving continuity to the Lasallian Charism is the responsibility of the whole Lasallian Family. Being heart, memory and guarantor of the Lasallian Charism means to promote association from a Church as People-of-God-Communion standpoint. In order for the Lasallian Charism to become a reality more shared and accepted by the members of the Lasallian Family, it is fundamental to see it as a “spiritual intuition” that permeates the entire experience of association. This mystical perspective must be consistent with Lasallian Spirituality, structures for mission, shared responsibilities and must maintain an open attitude enabling it to read the signs of the times in a multicultural and multireligious world.

The “for” of our Association

6.4. ...it is important to be continually reminded that the ultimate purpose of association is found in the expression, “**association for.**” Service in the Lasallian Mission is no mere abstract concept. Association exists *for* the educational advancement of the young, especially those who are poor.

6.8. Over the past few decades, a new phenomenon has appeared in Lasallian community life. The Institute recognizes not only the communities composed entirely of Brothers but also the communities of various combinations of Brothers, other consecrated religious, single and married persons, priests, and deacons.

Chapter 7 - Concluding Remarks

“So, He said, cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something. So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish.” (John 21: 6)

7.1. Picture the faces of the disciples as they again cast their nets in disbelief that one side of the boat rather than the other would be of any consequence. Imagine now their faces as

they try to gather in their bursting nets. Doubt and frustration are quickly transformed to awe and amazement and finally into the joy of recognizing the Lord they had so sorely missed. Is this not part of our story too? Are we not living in an age that invites us to go to the “other side of the boat” and lower our Lasallian Educational nets “together and by association” hoping to fish a great quantity of “souls far from salvation?”

7.2. Just as the disciples had returned to their former way of life, believing that hope was extinguished and dreams had vanished, some too today might feel abandoned by the very God who once called them “to fish.” As the Israelites were so often taunted on their desert journey with the question “Where is your God?” some also now question why they ever took that first step to Brotherhood, to Lasallian association. Let our prayer then be that of St. Augustine when he speaks to God as his ever-faithful companion: *Here I am before you with my strength and my ignorance. Where you have opened the door to me, welcome me at the entrance; where you have closed the door to me, open to my cry; enable me to remember you, to understand you, and to love you. Amen!*⁴⁶

7.3. The image of a God who welcomes, who walks alongside of us, who asks us to trust in the unimaginable, is the daily act of faith that has sustained the Brothers of the Christian Schools for more than three centuries. This image also symbolizes the vocational call of all Lasallians to confide in a God who calls “in a quiet imperceptible way...so that one commitment lead[s] ...into another without... having foreseen it in the beginning.”⁴⁷ This was De La Salle’s miraculous adventure with a God who always welcomed him. All you who serve the Lasallian Mission remember what God has promised us. As He spoke to the prophet Jeremiah so He speaks to us today: *“I know what my plans are for you, plans to save you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and to give you hope...When you call on me I will listen...I will gather you up from among all the nations... I will bring you home”*⁴⁸

7.4. Let us all rejoice in this pledge of hope...this bright future...this life-giving dream that invites us to remember always the holy presence of God and to touch the hearts of the young, especially the poor, together and by association.

St. John Baptist de La Salle...Pray for us.
Live Jesus in our Hearts...FOREVER!

**Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria FSC, Superior General
And the members of the General Council... Rome 2010**

The full document may be found at <http://lasallian.info/doc/Circular%20461.pdf> .