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Thematic Vocabulary of Lasallian Association

Lasallian Essays
Generalate FSC
Rome

May 2008

Lasallian Essays
Brothers of the Christian Schools
Via Aurelia 476
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Introduction

The purpose of this Thematic Vocabulary is to help clarify some concepts, starting from their current usage in the principal languages and cultures throughout the Lasallian world.

It is not our intent here to give official definitions of various terms that we often find in discourse on Lasallian association, but neither do we want to limit ourselves to just stating how they are used. Our intent is to provide some elements for discernment that may help in understanding each concept, to clear up possible confusion, and even to unify the way of using the term when it is possible to do so. That is why the Thematic Vocabulary can be an effective tool for group discussion, in support of Lasallian formation, in order to facilitate understanding within the discussion of themes relating to association or Lasallian identity in general. The Basic Bibliography included at the end can be used for an in-depth look at the different concepts.

The Thematic Vocabulary may be of special interest to inter-cultural groups or multi-language groups as a point of encounter for essential Lasallian concepts, but also for becoming aware of the differences of language that ought to be kept in mind for good understanding. Words can be tricky, because often underneath the same term different concepts are concealed, even though the term itself appears to be the same in different languages.

The text presented here is the result of lengthy discussions and dialogues, first of all at the Lasallian European Formation Commission (2005 and 2006, while Mr. Jean Leloup, from Belgium, served as its secretary), and then later with the collaboration of representatives of the different Lasallian Regions from other continents.

With a view to facilitating its use as a teaching tool, we have opted to arrange the topics in three parts:

- The first part is limited to presenting the central topic of “Association,” considering it especially from the point of its relationship to the two central axes from which it can be understood: *mission* and *communion*, in light of the concept of the Ecclesiology of Communion, which was developed after Vatican II.

- The second part presents the principal terms that express the spirit of Lasallian association.
- The third part gathers together some terms regarding structures that develop the concept of communion and leadership within Lasallian association or that allow association to be institutionalized.

Abbreviations

ChL	Christifideles Laici (John Paul II, 1988)
D	Declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in de World today (39 th General Chapter, 1967)
EM	Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer (St. John Baptist de La Salle)
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI, 1975)
FSC	Fratrum Scholarum Christianarum (with reference to the Institut “ <i>of the Brothers of the Christian Schools</i> ”)
MD	Meditations for all the Sundays (St. John Baptist de La Salle)
MF	Meditations for the principal Feasts (St. John Baptist de La Salle)
MR	Meditations for the Time of Retreat (St. John Baptist de La Salle)
NMI	Novo Millennio Ineunte (John Paul II, 2001)
VC	Vita Consecrata (John Paul II, 1996)

I

LASALLIAN ASSOCIATION

Towards an Understanding of
the Central Concept

1. A term with several meanings

1.1 The ambiguity and the opportunity of the term.

The term “association” is currently used to designate very diverse realities. It is, then, very appropriate to be aware of this ambiguity that might make understanding difficult, or at least to be certain that the speaker and the listener are on the same wavelength.

To begin with, we might well ask ourselves, why is this term “Lasallian association” still being used if its meaning lends itself to such confusion? Why not employ a less ambiguous term? The two following reasons speak for its continued use:

- The first harks back to our roots: it is the term that the Founder and the first Brothers used to describe their experience of communion for the mission. This particular term becomes, therefore, the bridge that permits us to come into contact with their charismatic experience. Besides that, we discover that the ambiguity of the term is about the same that is found with other expressions linked to religious experience when they are employed in reference to experiences which have nothing to do with religion. We have only to think of the word “Love” which the New Testament uses to speak of the essence of God...
- The second reason refers to the ecclesial practice so often found today in describing the collaboration between religious and lay persons who share the same charism. Usually, this relationship is been called “association” and the laity who take part in the charism are called “associates”. In our case the term applies not only to the lay people who share in the Lasallian charism but it can also identify the other religious who share that charism. The Brothers themselves, are, historically, the first “Lasallian associates”.

1.2 “Association” as a juridical organization.

In the most common social context, in the French, English, and Spanish-speaking world, “association” means an organization whose members are linked by a contract regarding meeting or defending very concrete goals, or the mutual protection of the members of the association. There is a very clear juridical shading, and the group is regulated by social laws.

- In the Lasallian world we have “associations” of this type: Associations of Lasallian Schools, Associations of School Headmasters/Principals, Associations of Lasallian Teachers, Associations of Former Students/Alumni...
- It is also the case that religious institutes, such as the FSC Institute, must take on the character of a “juridical organization”, according to the laws in force in each nation, in order to carry out the proper functions of its mission. In Belgium, for example, the Brothers are legally established as a “Non-profit Association”, according to the legislation of the country.

1.3 “Association” as an ecclesial entity.

The Code of Canon Law uses the term “association” to refer to the ecclesial organizations of the faithful, with or without legal status, which are formed to develop together some aspect of the Christian life or to live according to the spirit of a spiritual master (see Canons 215 and 303). In principle, these organizations do not need an official canonical recognition; in which case they are simply called “private associations of the faithful”. If their members do wish to be officially recognized, they can achieve this through the proper ecclesial authority, while still remaining as “private associations of the faithful”, with or without legal status. And finally, they may also be recognized as “public associations of the faithful”, always with legal status, and have as well the faculty to carry out certain functions in the name of the Church, such as Christian education and catechesis.

- In the Lasallian world there are numerous “private associations of the faithful”. The “Signum Fidei” Association is one of these, but there are many more of a local character. At the present time (2007), there is none recognized as a “public association of the faithful”.
- The Lasallian Religious Institutes of the Brothers, and of the Sisters, and the Lay Institute of “Catechists of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate” are associations of canonical character, but are designated “Institutes of Consecrated Life” (Canons 573 and 710).

2. The “Association” in the charismatic sense

2.1 Participation in the Lasallian charism.

When we speak of “association” in the primary sense of *participation in the Lasallian charism*, the organizational and juridical aspects move to second place, as well as does the contractual aspect. But everything that refers to communion among persons, communion in the same charism, moves to first place, in order to participate in the mission that justifies this association. It is something that is very “existential” and it has to do with very vital concepts such as “process or life journey,” “vocation,” “identity,” “relationships between persons,” “commitment,” and even “consecration,” that is to say, specific reference to God. All these shadings are present in the term “association” when the central perspective has to do with participation in the Lasallian charism.

2.2 A Trinitarian basis.

Lasallian association, in its charismatic sense, must necessarily be linked to the Blessed Trinity. It is its very deepest root because, essentially, the association, formed for the Lasallian mission as understood by John Baptist de La Salle, is to participate in the communion and the salvific mission of the Trinity, and for that reason, to “procure its glory”. The term “association” therefore, in the Lasallian charismatic sense, corresponds to that of “consecration” and viceversa (see “Consecration” in this Vocabulary).

To appreciate this Trinitarian basis of the Lasallian association we have only to read Meditation 201 of John Baptist de La Salle. There the Founder reveals the source of the association that binds us. It is an experience of communion and participation in the very life of the Trinity, in its saving role, specifically in the Christian education of children.

Throughout the Meditation, De La Salle shows us the three Persons carrying out the mission of salvation, each in his own way, and each one associating in the same dynamism as the Church and her ministers (us). It is the portrait of *Communion for the Mission* in its most original sources: the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and the Church. At the sight of these sources, De

La Salle invites us to share and to enter “*zealously*” into this covenant; we share God’s Work and work in the Lord’s vineyard; we share the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us to build up the Church; we share the zeal of Jesus Christ for his Church, and that of the Church for her faithful; we share the zeal of God for the salvation of souls and that of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, for his sheep...

2.3 An Ecclesial basis.

For some years now, the Lasallian association is no longer limited to the association between the Brothers, rather it includes very diverse forms of association. The bases of the new association can be found in today’s ecclesiology which rediscovers what was the habitual practice among the first Christians, as the New Testament shows us.

We refer to a text of St. Paul, *Romans 16, 1-16*, although it is not the only one in which mention is made of a great diversity of persons (twenty-eight, in fact), all of them united in communion and in the mission next to Paul and for different reasons.

Some, like Paul, are *consecrated for life* to the ministry of the Word; others carry out, with greater or lesser intensity, *explicitly missionary tasks*, among whom two married couples are cited; many others simply support *the charisma of the presence*, affective support, solidarity in difficult times and when suffering is present. All of them *share the risk of faith* for the cause of Christ. Among them their social origin varies a great deal: men and women, slaves and free...

It is the concrete example of *association for mission* among consecrated and the laity: it is not only collaborating in the work but *communion in lives*, fraternal relationships, professed affection, shared responsibilities... and without “*a priori*” priorities of some over others.

2.4 Association: a process.

Association, understood as a **process**, includes dynamics that develop the assimilation of the Lasallian charisma: during this process, the person takes on the Lasallian identity and is in solidarity with other Lasallians in order, “together and by association,” to promote the Lasallian educational mission. In short, it is the process of communion for mission based on the Lasallian charisma.

The 43rd General Chapter spells out this process by highlighting Lasallian characteristics that are developed within the process, and those which then are used to describe an “associate”:

“There are partners who have a long record of collaborating in the Lasallian Mission, and who feel a call to deepen the charism, spirituality and Lasallian communion in which they wish to participate. In particular, their lives are already marked by a number of distinctively Lasallian characteristics:

- *a vocation inspired by the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and his values;*
- *a life of faith which discovers God in everyday life understood in light of Scripture and, for persons of other religions, in the light of their own sacred texts;*
- *a community experience of some form or other suited to the identity of its members;*
- *a mission of some duration which associates persons with the educational service of the poor;*
- *an openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment”* (Circular 447, pp. 4-5).

2.5 Association: the overall group of Associates.

Association, understood as the *result of a process*, refers to the overall group of associates. The term “*Lasallian Association*” at this level of understanding, is not firmly-rooted nor is it satisfactory to many, since it is easily confused with juridical organizations referred to earlier.

- Its equivalence with the term “*Lasallian Family*” must be ruled out, since this term includes many people with a great variety of links to the lasallian charism. But it is commonly accepted that the “*Lasallian Association*” is part of the “*Lasallian Family*.”
- There is an increasing trend to see it as a “*communion of Lasallian communities*.” The term “*Lasallian Community*” could respond to this concept. In fact, the equivalent of this term is currently used by other religious congregations to designate the overall group of persons who live in communion under the respective charism (for example, the Viatorian Community). At the moment, the term “*Lasallian Community*” is used only with a local meaning.

3. Mission and Communion: The two central poles of Association

3.1 Mission: Sending and Task.

The term “Mission” gathers together two concepts that are complementary. These two concepts are not always kept in mind, which gives rise to confusion as well as an inappropriate use of the term.

- **Sending.** The etymological root of “mission” is “*missio*,” from Latin, and it means first of all “sending” or “assignment”¹. It is related to “call” or “vocation.”
- **Task.** The object of the sending, the “for what” one is sent, is the other concept that is expressed in the word “mission,” and the term has captured this concept.

3.2 Anthropological and Social Foundation of the Mission.

The mission has, to begin with, a human face before it can be seen with the eyes of faith.

3.2.1. Anthropological meaning.

The anthropological meaning of the mission comes through as the relation that is created between two human beings when the need of one is felt by the other as a call that requires a response.

It is not enough to discover or perceive a need, or rather, a person in need, in order to constitute a “mission”. It is necessary to feel oneself impelled or sent to give a response or solution to that need. It is here that the mission is born. This is its first anthropological component with the double aspect of call/sent. The second component corresponds to the mission as a task: the person who accepts “being sent” tries to give an effective response in order to resolve the need that motivated his “sending”.

We find this anthropological foundation at the root of the **Lasallian Mis-**

¹ This concept is that which gives meaning to the phrase used in religious congregations: “to give or to receive an obedience,” as does an appointment from the Bishop to be able to teach the Catholic religion within the Diocese.

sion: John Baptist de La Salle, firstly, and then those who joined in his effort, discovered the need for the education of children and poor youth. They felt it as a pressing call and they accepted to give a response by undertaking an educational action aimed at solving that situation of need.

3.2.2. Social meaning.

The social meaning of mission springs from the anthropological basis. When a need is experienced as such by the social agents or representatives of society at different levels, they look for and commission others to find the solution. As frequently happens, this social concern is unleashed thanks to a prophetic sign seen in those who had previously experienced the mission at its anthropological level. As these have already given an effective response through their own initiative, they receive social backing by way of “being sent” to carry on responding but now in an official way.

The social basis of the mission gives rise to *commissioning*. The one who is commissioned, or the functionary, is one who is sent to resolve a social situation of need. However, when the anthropological basis no longer exists, the commissioning becomes just another way to earn a living.

The social dimension of the **Lasallian Mission** came about as soon as the representatives of society² called upon John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers to found the schools and the parents themselves confided their sons to the Brothers for their education. When that occurred, the education imparted by the Brothers by means of the schools became a social mission, and they became *functionaries* or agents at the service of that society.

Nevertheless, there was an essential difference between these “functionaries” (the Brothers) and the other functionaries that opposed them (the writing masters). These latter had lost, or had not never really developed, the anthropological dimension of the mission so that what they were doing had become simply a way to earn a living. The difference then between these and the other functionaries was not primarily the task that they were doing but the tie that bound them to the task that they were un-

² The “social representatives” for this purpose and at that time in the history of the Lasallian beginnings were the parish and diocesan clergy, the municipal groups in charge of caring for the poor in cities and villages, the guilds and corporations of artisans and, finally, lay Christians who, either on their own or as members of charitable associations, sponsored the education of the poor as part of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

dertaking. That tie was, for some, their personal advantage; while for the others it was their response to the situation of need of the children.

3.2.3. A common level to coincide.

These first two dimensions of the mission appear fundamental, especially in secularized society in which the Lasallian Mission often takes place. In all educational endeavors we find agents with various motivations, mentalities and religious positions. It is easy to coincide on a common level e.g.: the social dimension of the educational mission. All are “sent” by society (elected officials, parents, etc.) to undertake an educational work. With or without the official title, all are social *functionaries*. Setting out from this common basis we need some assistance to unearth and penetrate more deeply into what gives life to the social dimension, and that would be the anthropological dimension of the mission.

The sensibility of educators must be aroused and cultivated in order to permit them to perceive the cries of the needs of their students, and even more especially of the poorest children and youngsters among them, and to discover that their educational labor is the art that provides the best possible answer for those needs.

3.3 Gospel and Ecclesial Foundations of the Mission.

3.3.1. Gospel meaning.

We can find the Gospel sense of the mission reflected in Jesus himself in his parable of the owner of the vineyard who, in the course of a long day, goes out at different times to contract laborers for his vineyard (Mat 20, 1-16).

The workers receive the “*missio*” from the owner of the vineyard: *You, too, go into my vineyard*. It is God who calls; the initiative belongs to Him. The mission as *task* is symbolized by the work of the vineyard, but also is identified with the vineyard itself.

The document *Christifideles Laici* of John Paul II (1988) takes this parable of the workers in the vineyard as the connecting thread of his entire discourse. Who is the vineyard, and who are the workers?

“The gospel parable sets before our eyes the Lord’s vast vineyard and the multitude of persons, both women and men, who are called and sent forth by him to labor in it. The vineyard is the whole world (cf. Mt

13:38), which is to be transformed according to the plan of God in view of the final coming of the Kingdom of God” (ChL 1.2).

“You go, too. The call is a concern not only of Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world” (ChL 2.4).

3.3.2. Ecclesial meaning.

The ecclesial sense of the mission is in continuity with the Gospel sense expressed in the parable above.

The first aspect that we must underline is the origin of the mission from which the “being sent” emanates and the reason for being sent. Paul VI developed this theme in a fundamental document of the post-conciliar period, the *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

“The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the Twelve... Having been born consequently out of being sent, the Church in her turn is sent by Jesus... And it is above all His mission and His condition of being an evangelizer that she is called upon to continue. For the Christian community is never closed in upon itself... Thus it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole.” (EN 15.2 & 3).

Jesus is, then, the source of the ecclesial mission; that is, simply put, the continuation of the mission of Jesus and this mission consists in spreading the Gospel.

The mission is central to the identity of the Church. Truly, it is what justifies the very existence of the Church:

“The task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (EN 14).

Traditionally, there are two terms have been used to specify the objective of the ecclesial mission: *to save* and *to evangelize*. But it is important to note the breadth that each attains according to the way the Church understands them in its reflection since the time of Vatican Council II:

“For the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed. Hence the focal point of our total presentation will be man

himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will.” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* 3).

“Evangelization, ... is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative.” (EN 24)

And John Paul II says: *“Such a mission has the purpose of making everyone know and live the ‘new’ communion that the Son of God made man introduced into the history of the world”* (ChL 32.4).

We are dealing, then, with a very ample process, one that covers many aspects that must constantly be kept in mind and which no one should try to advance by one’s efforts. *“Any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it.”* (EN 17.2)

The identity of the Church is forged in the dynamism established between these two poles: evangelizing and being evangelized (EN 15.5). Within that dynamism all the members of the Church are included so that the Church sees herself as a community that both wishes to evangelize and be evangelized at the same time.

“The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love.” (EN 15.4)

Placed within that dynamism the Church knows herself to be *“the depositary of the Good News to be proclaimed”* (EN 15.5), and, with that consciousness as *“having been sent and evangelized, the Church herself sends out evangelizers. She puts on their lips the saving Word..., she gives them the mandate which she herself has received and she sends them out to preach.”* (EN 15.6).

The mission fans out into multiple forms, with an enormous variety of services and ministries, but it will always be **the unique mission of the Church**: *“In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission”* (Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2.3).

The ecclesial mission is the work of each and every one, and in no case can it be limited to the work of an individual: “*Evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is one that is deeply ecclesial.*” (EN 60.2)

3.3.3. Lasallian Mission: Gospel and Ecclesial Mission.

We situate the Lasallian Mission within this conceptual framework of the mission of the Church. Those of us who participate in this mission receive it from the Church and through her, from Jesus Christ himself, sent by the Father (cf. Meditations of DLS for the Time of Retreat, especially 195.2, 201.2).

The Lasallian educational mission is an ecclesial mission insofar as it is a participation in the salvific and evangelizing mission of the Church. It fits in with the rest of the ecclesial mission, as one parcel of that unique vineyard (cf. MR 199.1). It contributes efficaciously to the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ, as the Founder so often repeated (cf. MR 193.3; 198.3; 199.1.3; 200.1...).

The concrete tasks that comprise the Lasallian educational mission, from the most “profane” to the most “religious” form part of the unique process of evangelization and can be legitimately characterized as “ecclesial works”. Into this singular process the anthropological, social, evangelical and ecclesial bases or dimensions that we have made reference to are joined together and integrated. Within that process, and without being separate from it, the catechetical role, or looking at the faith more deeply, takes on a special importance, which the Brothers have had entrusted to them since the very beginnings of the Institute, as their “principal function” (FSC Rule, 15).

3.4 Unique Mission, Shared Mission.

3.4.1. Shared Ecclesial Mission.

With the parable of the workers in the vineyard as our background, let us now try to grasp the meaning of another essential characteristic of the mission of the Church, and, by extension, the Lasallian mission as well. It is a *shared mission*. We do not speak of this as something tacked on, but as something that belongs to it.

The call and the sending (the first concept of “mission”) include the idea of the recognition of a series of qualities and skills that make the subject

suitable for the task that is entrusted to him. The one who is sent also prepares himself by acquiring the resources and the knowledge that will permit him to fulfill successfully the task that has been entrusted to him. In this sense, the one sent – be it a person, group, or an institution – can become an intermediary for others, as he accepts to share that wealth with which he serves the mission.

Under this perspective, “shared mission” begins with mutual recognition between those who are sent and, as a consequence of this, sharing among themselves what it is that will help them to be faithful to the sending that has been received.

Those who are sent on mission find themselves in “the vineyard” with others who have been sent. It is not up to them to decide if they share the mission (the work in the vineyard) with other workers. It is the Owner of the vineyard who has sent them, It is he who has called them to work in the vineyard, and he does this as he wants, when he wants, and he invites whom he wants. The mission is a *shared one*, primarily because that is the will of the vineyard’s Owner.

As they work in the vineyard, as they meet one another, as they recognize that they have been sent, they realize that they must do the task “together.” “Together” means that they agree, they collaborate and they help one another, they feel co-responsible... The mission leads them to communion. The results of the mission will depend upon the quality of the bonds of communion that the workers have created among themselves.

3.4.2. Shared Lasallian Mission.

As we know it today, the shared Lasallian mission begins when the Brothers recognize that other persons with distinct identities are also called by the Owner of the vineyard for the same assignment, “the human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor.” As a result of this, they accept to share the charism that will prepare them for the mission, the spirituality that gives it meaning, the historic heritage that begins with the Founder and his writings, the culture that has been forged... The Brothers thus become *mediators* of the Spirit for the transmission of the Lasallian charism. Then comes reciprocity, because the new ones who have been sent also share their own gifts with the first ones.

Personal life journeys and the collective *Lasallian identity* are developed in this reciprocal participation of gifts.

At the same time, as they find themselves together on the mission or the Lasallian assignment, those Lasallians who have been sent realize that the mission calls them to communion. They cannot be limited to form “work teams” because the task that has been entrusted to them is to build up the human community along with children and young people, it is to introduce them, especially the poor, to community relationships as children of God, it is to offer them the warm welcome of the ecclesial community. That mission or task demands that they themselves live and develop communion, in the various forms of community which the initiative and the generosity of one another, inspired by the Spirit, invite them to construct.

3.5 Communion: The Source and the Fruit of Mission.

3.5.1. The Ecclesiology of Communion.

Mission and communion are two concepts that should be viewed simultaneously if you want to understand their significance in the Church framework, and if you want to understand the meaning of Lasallian Association in that light.

Both concepts incorporate the “*ecclesiology of communion*,” which is the central and fundamental idea of the Council documents (ChL 19.1). Mission and communion are the two essential dimensions of Christian faith; they allow us to understand, or rather, they introduce us to the identity or the mystery of the Church. “*Only from inside the Church’s mystery of communion is the ‘identity’ of the lay faithful made known*” (ChL 8.6), just as all of us faithful, who make up the Church.

Church reflection over the course of the 40 years since Vatican II has been a spiral deepening, starting from these two axes, Mission and Communion, in order to make plain the identity of the Church and her faithful.

The communion that we highlight here as an “axis” cannot be reduced to the human horizontal dimension, since it has its roots and its point of departure in communion with Jesus and the Trinity: “*From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another: all are branches of a single vine, namely, Christ. In this communion is the wonderful reflection and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of love in God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed by the Lord Jesus.*” (ChL 18.4).

The focal point of this reflection comes from the document of John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), which he published after the Synod of the Bishops of 1987 on *The Vocation and the Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World*. The central theme of the mystery of the Church, that is, “her deepest identity” (EN14), is identified as “Church/Communion”. This is the central theme of evangelization, “the divine plan for the salvation of humanity” (ChL 19.4).

And that tension of “*evangelizing and being evangelized*”, of which Paul VI speaks in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, becomes specific in the dynamism established between mission and communion, but it is an intimate relationship where one cannot exist without the other, and where one becomes the other reciprocally:

“Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point *that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion*” (ChL 32.4)

Communion, then, is not locked up inside the Church but it goes beyond it and it becomes mission:

“On her part, the Church knows that the communion received by her as a gift is destined for all people. Thus the Church feels she owes to each individual and to humanity as a whole the gift received from the Holy Spirit that pours the charity of Jesus Christ into the hearts of believers, as a mystical force for internal cohesion and external growth.” (ChL 32.4).

Communion and mission together form the vital environment that gathers together all the faithful and which depends on everyone. In this *ecosystem* of Church Communion each of the members lives in relationship with the others, without losing the special character of each one, which is in itself a treasure for the whole:

“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." (ChL 55.3)

3.5.2. The Spirituality of Communion.

The reflection that followed with the Synods around the different states of life in the Church has deepened the mystery of Church Communion.

"Vita Consecrata" (1996) added the concept of the *"spirituality of communion"*: "The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a *spirituality of communion*, promotes a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension" (VC 46).

The document, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* in which John Paul II welcomed the new millennium, developed this concept, putting it forward as *"an educational principle in all places wherever people and Christians are formed, wherever altar ministers, consecrated persons, those who work in pastoral ministry are trained, wherever families and communities are built up."*

"– A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us.

– A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as 'those who are a part of me' ...

– A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God...

– A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to 'make room' for our brothers and sisters, bearing 'each other's burdens'" (Gal 6.2)... (NMI, 43).

This spirituality is like the blood that runs through the veins of the whole body of the Church in order to reach all its members. From it, the great challenge that John Paul II made to the entire Church takes its strength as the high point and the practical result of this reflection on Church Communion:

"To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings" (NMI, 43).

3.5.3. Consecrated Life and Plan for Unity.

The pontifical document *Vita Consecrata* (1996), which was preceded and prepared by the discussion that took place at the International Congress of Religious (1993), and at the Synod on Religious Life (1994), recovers the value and the significance of consecrated life in the Church, precisely in the context of ecclesial communion and in service of it: “*Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion as “witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.”*” (VC 46.1).

Post-Council development of the ecclesiology of communion has brought with it an important shift as regards consecrated life in the bosom of the Church. This shift brought about, first of all, doubt about its meaning and its value within the Church. Then, ecclesiology of communion itself has come to rescue consecrated life, in stating its need and its prophetic sense, its irreplaceable role in the overall process of communion in which the Church is engaged. Consecrated life is now challenged to get involved decisively in this plan of communion (“*plan for unity*”) that belongs to the entire Church, and to find in it its own place next to other Christians, in service of the common and unique ecclesial mission.

If in former times consecrated life was valued for what separated it from other Christian people, now it is especially valued for that which unites it to Christian people, and for which it becomes a sign that raises questions, recalls, raises concerns, reports, and encourages.

“A particular duty of the consecrated life is to *remind the baptized of the fundamental values of the Gospel...*” (VC 33.1). “*The consecrated life, by its very existence in the Church, seeks to serve the consecration of the lives of all the faithful, clergy and laity alike.*” (VC 33.2). “*The fact that all are called to become saints cannot fail to inspire more and more those who by their very choice of life have the mission of reminding others of that call.*” (VC 39.2). “The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of *spreading the spirituality of communion*, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries...” (VC 51.1)

II

The Spirit and Development of Lasallian Association

Associates (Lasallian associates)

1. To whom does this term apply?

Basically, the term designates those persons and, by extension, groups, that participate in the Lasallian charism, and that are explicitly and decisively responsible for, in solidarity with others, the overall Lasallian educational program.

According to the 43rd General Chapter, “We recognize as being *associated* with the Lasallian mission all intentional groups and all persons who respond to an interior call by an educational commitment which has Lasallian characteristics, and which has been authenticated by a competent authority” (Circular 447, p. 6).

The District is “the frame of reference for all forms of association already in place, or that are going to be adopted” (id, p. 9), and it’s the job of their representatives (the Visitor and his Council, according to the General Chapter) the recognition or authentication of the new associates (id. p. 5).

The same General Chapter, in the year 2000, officially recognized “*intentional Lasallian groups*,” and they are, therefore, *associates*: the Guadalupanas Sisters of De La Salle, the Lasallian Sisters of Vietnam, the Catechists of Jesus Crucified and Mary Immaculate, and the following groups, Signum Fidei and the Lasallian Fraternity (formerly, the Lasallian Third Order) (cf. Circular 447, p. 5).

2. Lack of Unanimity.

The use of this term varies greatly throughout the Lasallian world:

- Some use it to designate all those who collaborate in the Lasallian mission. Such a use seems to be an overstatement, since it disregards the indispensable minimum requirement which is the *intentionality* of the supposed “associates” of wanting to support the Lasallian educational project.
- Others restrict the term to apply it only to those laity who have made a formal promise of association, after having been accepted by the Brother Visitor and his Council. It could be argued that the *intentionality* and the *disposition* for association are not always expressed, not even in principle, by means of an official formula or act.

- It is wise to point out that the term corresponds, first of all, to the Brothers, since historically they are the first “associates” in the Lasallian charism. Therefore, it is not really correct to say “the Brothers and the Associates,” as if the Associates were only the “non-Brothers,” or as if they were the ones who associate “with” the Brothers, and not reciprocally so.
- The use of the term to recognize associates “in fact” is even more vague and variable. These would be those persons who, without having made any official or juridical sign, or an external promise, manifest by their ongoing disposition and their unmistakable acts, that they do in fact participate in this Association.

3. Discernment.

Inclusivity and exclusivity are radical positions, and it would be advisable to avoid them in the recognition of associates. It is wiser to engage in a process of discernment to recognize association “in fact,” which would always precede “formal” association, whether or not a “formal” association ever does take place. This association “in fact” is made manifest by:

- a steady disposition of solidarity with other Lasallians and with commitment to the Lasallian mission;
- seeking to be sustained by Lasallian spirituality and seeking meaning from it; an awareness of collaborating in God’s work;
- a clear sense of belonging to the common Lasallian story and to the District; regular participation in District or area meetings, as well as in courses and formation meetings;
- participation in some community experience with other Lasallians;
- an interest in and openness toward the universality of the Lasallian mission.

4. Two inseparable levels: the local and the universal.

The associated person manifests his belonging and his interdependence on two closely linked levels:

- On the immediate or local level, with a group of persons with whom he lives communion, shares, and deeply embraces the Lasallian charism in the “here and now.” With them he tries to build or strengthen the sign of the local community in view of the beneficia-

ries of the mission. To do this, he works to develop ties of communion with other Lasallian groups and with those with whom he shares the local mission.

- On the universal level (or that which tends toward the universal), with the Lasallian institution (District, Region, Institute...) in which the local group is involved. Through this institution, solidarity is extended toward the rest of the Lasallian Family and Association.

Brother

1. Brother (of the Christian Schools).

“Brother” is the name universally employed to refer to each and every one who is a member of the Institute founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle. The first Rule states it in this way: *“The members of this Institute are to be called Brothers and they will never permit that they be named in any other way”* (Rule of 1718, chap. 1,1).

The name was chosen by the Lasallian community since 1684, even though it was most likely already used among the members of the community in the previous two years. It indicates a positive choice: they had decided to change their title from “masters”, as they had been known up to that point, to that of “Brothers”, to more directly express the type of system that they were establishing, a life-program of Brotherhood for the ministry. They wished to be brothers amongst themselves and brothers for their pupils.

- The name expresses, first of all, the sort of relationships that they wanted to create among themselves. It is a plan to create fraternity, brotherhood, a program of communion between peers which had as its model the description given by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles about the way the first Christians lived: *“They had one heart and one soul... they held everything in common...”*. John Baptist de La Salle often expressed and proposed this ideal to his Brothers (cf EM 2.27; Meditations 39,3; 65; 74,1; 91,2; 113,2).
- At the same time it also indicates the way that they wished to be seen and appreciated by their pupils, the type of relationship as educators between teachers and pupils. The aspect of fraternity is inseparable from the overarching plan of a school that teaches in the spirit of Jesus

Christ. In the makeup of a fraternal school the educators make the first contribution with their own persons, with their closeness to children and youngsters and with the brotherly style of relations among them. The *Conduct of the Christian Schools* is replete with references to this close, affectionate and fraternal style of the educators in their dealings with their pupils.

As a consequence, the title “Brother” referring to the members of the Lasallian Institute, should in no way be understood in a negative sense, by the fact of “not being priests”. Nevertheless, that confusion often occurs, causing the true motive and meaning of the title to lose importance or even be forgotten.

2. Brother/sister, a charismatic dimension of every Lasallian.

The Brother (of the Christian Schools) is but one sign, and not an exclusive one, of the fraternity within the Lasallian Family. We can say that he personalizes through his consecration what constitutes a charismatic dimension of every Lasallian, the style of brotherhood, as much in his relationship with other Lasallians as in his relations with those who benefit from the mission.

To be brother or sister is part of the commitment of association, essential if the new Lasallian association is to be continued in the context of Church-Communion, the original plan of John Baptist de La Salle, and for the Lasallian educators, men and women, to go forward building a fraternal school which gives the greatest importance to the persons of the children and to each child in particular. It fosters a style of life lived in community which has as its main key an education that “*touches the hearts*” (in French, “*toucher les coeurs*”) of the pupils (cf. MS 43,3; MF 139,3).

Charism (The Lasallian Charism)

1. Towards an understanding:

- **In the broad sense**, by *charism* we understand as a gift or personal quality with a positive social outreach.
- **In a context of faith**: Charism is a *gift* which the *Holy Spirit* gives to a person for the service of the community, or better yet, to contribute to the *mission* of the community.

“Whether they be exceptional and great or simple and ordinary, the charisms are *graces of the Holy Spirit that have, directly or indirectly, a usefulness for the ecclesial community*, ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world” (*Christifideles Laici*, 24.2).

- **The Lasallian charism** is a gift of the Spirit that has allowed us to discover, value, and respond appropriately to the human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor. The gift is given to the Church in the person of John Baptist de La Salle and it is incarnated in the Lasallian community.

2. The charism of the founder and the foundational charism:

The “**charism of the founder**” is a specific charism granted to a person in order to found: to set in motion a collective identity with a participatory charism in service of a particular mission. *John Baptist de La Salle* had this charism as founder. He and the first Brothers set in motion the **foundational charism** (or the *Lasallian charism* of the origins) for the mission of giving a human and Christian education to “*the children of artisans and the poor.*”

The Lasallian charism generates a particular *spiritual affinity* (cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 24) among many persons, in service of Christian education. It is, then, a *participatory* charism which gives rise to the *Lasallian identity*, and it can be discovered and lived by other forms of Christian existence, different from that in which it was historically “born.”

3. The richness of the Lasallian charism:

The charism is a strength, it is a global stance towards life (or a way of “looking at” life, which is the *spirit of faith*), it is a special sensitivity to specific needs, which in our case are the educational needs of the poor, the young people; it is a sense of responsibility awake in us to give solutions to those needs, it is the creativity which is generated so that the responses can be the best possible ones, and it is the ability to discern between possible options presented to us and the criteria we use to act and to respond.

The term “charism” does not belong to initial Lasallian vocabulary, although John Baptist de La Salle often refers to the Spirit and its gifts. But the content of Lasallian charism can be easily identified in the writings of

the Founder centered around this core: *the spirit of faith and zeal, lived in community/fraternity, at the educational service of the poor*. From this core other constitutive elements of the Lasallian charism unfold: the spirit of faith leads us to discover our history and daily experience as the history of salvation in which we collaborate with God to bring salvation to *“the children of artisans and the poor.”* This is *God’s Work* for which He consecrated us, he made us his *ministers*. We carry out this ministry *“together and by association.”* We live fraternity, not only with our brothers in community, but also with our students. Our education tries to *touch hearts*, it has a personalized dimension whose paradigm is the image of the *Good Shepherd*.

Commitment

1. A concrete act or a dimension?

We are accustomed to use the term “commitment”, at times to make reference to something very localized and limited in time, in quantity or in the effort that supposes like a duty, some dealings, some responsibility. At other times we employ the term to express a dimension that affects the entire person; for example, the bond that one person has established with another in matrimony. This second form is what is present when it is said that a person is very “committed” to the plight of the poor, or with science, or with the ecology, etc., because this implies that his way of regarding the world, his daily preoccupations, his personal formation, his most frequent conversations, etc., are marked by that commitment.

When we speak of “commitment” with regard to the Lasallian Association, we are referring, above all, to this second dimension, that can impact in depth one’s life.

2. The commitment of the person with the community.

The commitment of association refers to the condition of the person who becomes associated, starting always from his concrete situation and the state in life in which the person is found, not in spite of those situations.

Commitment to association can adopt various forms. All of them offer as a common denominator *the will to incarnate the Lasallian charism today, in communion with other Lasallians, men and women, for the benefit of the*

Christian education of young people, preferably children and young people who are poor, and to do this with relative stability.

The commitment of association has to do *with persons* (the other members engaged in the Lasallian mission), *before considering the works*. That is to say, it does not refer primarily to the work/task or to the development of a particular action, nor does it consist necessarily in doing more things or dedicating more time. *It refers explicitly to solidarity with the Lasallian community* at its various levels and corresponds, at the same time, to a vocational projection of one's life in response to what is felt to be a call from God. It is translated into *relationship*, into sharing, into communion. And finally it manifests itself in *belonging*. It is a bond that creates solidarity with others, and therefore demonstrates dependence on one another.

To commit oneself is to take a stance in favor of the targets and the objectives of the Lasallian Community:

- the preferred targets: “abandoned” children and young people, that is to say, the poor; and even the poorest among the poor;
- fundamental objectives: integrated and Gospel-based education.

3. The public expression (or formalization) of the commitment of association.

The commitment of association can be officially or publicly formalized using a sanctioned formula.

The practice of the district in designing the formalization of the commitment is quite varied:

- In some districts this formalization is considered indispensable in order for the person in question to be received as an “associate”.
- At the extreme opposite, other districts totally dispense with a set formalization and prefer to look upon the associates from an existential point of view or practice: the associates are those who are living in the spirit of association. Some districts, in fact, prefer to make no difference whatever between partners and associates.
- In an intermediate position, some districts accept two possibilities: the formal sign of association for those who wish it, and who are living out the association without formalizing it for those who want no formal gesture. The former and the latter are invited to participate in the diverse encounters or activities that are part of the association.

4. The formula of commitment.

There is no one, official formula, although each Lasallian group tends to have a common formula for those who are associating themselves by means of this group; this is the situation in the case of the Brothers and with the members of *Signum Fidei*. One District has opted for a common formula for all lay associates, or for one in which each one specifies his own commitment. In many cases, the person or group that is associating makes up their own formula of association, in dialogue with representatives from the District.

What is important is that the formula makes explicit reference to the three targets of Lasallian association: God, other associates, and the beneficiaries of the mission. Or, said in a negative way: do not reduce the formula to a devotional consecration to God, nor to an act of solidarity with other Lasallian associates, nor to a commitment to social action. The act of Lasallian association gathers together and ties these three bonds together.

Consecration

1. Religious consecration – Christian consecration.

The term “consecration” has been often applied almost exclusively to mean “*religious consecration*,” such as that of a Brother, although theologically it is linked to the bond established by baptism between human beings and God.

As the theology of Christian life evolved over time and concepts that had been reserved as “the exclusive domain” of religious life were recovered, the term *consecration* became the common dominion of all Christians.

2. Consecration – Association.

In the context of Lasallian association, the term “consecration” describes a fundamental dimension of association since it refers explicitly to God, to whom is attributed the initiative of this association for the Christian education of the poor (“*God’s work*”). God is put forward as the witness of the commitment itself, and he is recognized as the guarantor of commitment itself as well as of the continuity of association.

In Lasallian founding history, *consecration* and *association* are equivalent: the Brother consecrates himself as he associates for mission, and he associates for mission in his consecration. His religious consecration is his association. We say “*religious*” consecration on account of the radical availability that it brings, that is to say, that of celibacy in community, which excludes other life options such as marriage. This availability is present from the very beginning although it was not expressed with the classic vows of the evangelical counsels.

Consecration in Lasallian association has three targets: God, the other associates, the poor children and young people who have been the main cause for association. It is a *covenant* that unites the consecrated, simultaneously, with the three targets.

3. Consecration – Commitment.

In the context of Lasallian association, *consecration* is also equivalent to *commitment*, always keeping in mind the three targets of the same covenant. The member of the “Signum Fidei Fraternity” use the term *consecration* (“*I consecrate myself...*”) for their formula, while other laity prefer to use the term *commitment* (“*I commit myself...*”), since it seems closer to the lay character. The two terms are legitimate, and what is important is to ensure that there is always explicit mention of the three targets of *consecration* or of *commitment*, since this is one of the essential characteristics of Lasallian association.

Culture (Lasallian Culture)

1. Culture, charism, identity.

Culture is the visible expression of a charism through the prism of an historical legacy. It is also the external manifestation of a collective identity, the assembly of expressions which permits those who assume that identity to recognize one another.

- There exists a Lasallian culture common to all who share in that identity, that is over and above the differences that are based on the variety of countries, races, and geographical cultures where we find that the Lasallian identity has taken root.

- The Lasallian culture also has aspects that belong more to some regions than to others, since the Lasallian identity expresses itself in each place according to the tastes of the regional culture: illustrations, songs, prayers, symbols or gestures which are meaningful for some places but little significant for others. Something similar can be said with regard to ages: there are elements of Lasallian culture that young people latch onto but which do not fit other age sets, and viceversa.

Identity is not equivalent with the expressions or the way it is described. In fact, it is possible to assume many different Lasallian culture expressions without to share in Lasallian identity. But certain it is that the cultural expression which reflects our identity allows us to recognise ourselves as the same as other Lasallians in different parts of the world. By means of these descriptions we can understand the experiences and sentiments which are at their root.

2. Manifestations of Lasallian culture.

Lasallian culture is based, primarily, on the historic life's journey of de La Salle and his Institute, on certain pedagogical systems and certain expressions of faith... There are graphic expressions, icons, which reflect experiences of our identity or our spirituality. There is a common vocabulary that goes back to the Founder or which have been employed throughout our long history and with which we identify ourselves.

Let us point out some of its manifestations:

2.1 The family icons.

These family icons are common symbols which members of the same family understand in the same way. We recognise ourselves in them, they reflect for us our history and our identity. The contemplation of the icons allows us to connect with the deep experiences and feelings of those who were their originators. And this contemplation refer us to certain attitudes common to the family.

There are specific icons of the Lasallian world beginning, for example, with the image of de La Salle (like the one that shows the Founder accompanied by one or two boys, or a boy and a girl, which has one of his hands pointing on high). Or also, we have the images that represent key

and very significant moments in the story of de La Salle, such as that of the Heroic Vow or 1691, or the Vow of 1694...

There are other icons which were not originally Lasallian, but which have been taken over by Lasallian culture because through them we feel that certain important aspects of our identity are expressed, or because they represent experiences and teachings that the Founder communicates to us through his meditations: the Good Shepherd, the ladder of Jacob, Saint Martin sharing his cloak with the poor man, the Icon of the Trinity of Rublev...

2.2 Vocabulary and literary expressions.

Based on our spirituality and our understanding of what education is, we have acquired certain ways of expressing our ideas, certain formulae containing a depth of meaning. With careful use, this culture of vocabulary and expression greatly strengthens our sense of belonging to the same family and assists us in handing on the essential elements of our Lasallian identity.

- Centralising our spirituality on Christ is well expressed in our community prayer: *Live Jesus in our hearts*. And our sense of collaborating in the Work of God is seen in that other formula of ours which begins many of our daily activities: *Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God*. The importance of our educational work is expressed in this term: *ministry*. We say that we are *ministers and representative of Jesus Christ*, which is an expression found in Paul's epistles and in the writings of de La Salle.
- There are many expressions in our daily use which date back to our origins and all of them are charged with emotive meaning, because they refer to important aspects of our identity, sometimes with reference to community, at other times to educational and spiritual elements like: *together by association, touching the hearts of our students, through the movement of the Spirit* (*“par le mouvement de l'Esprit”*).
- Now culture continues to grow with the result that new forms of expression appear for example: The Lasallian Evangelical journey; or those recent summaries of lasallian identity: *Faith, fraternity, service, or faith, service and community*.

Formation for Association

1. A complex process.

Formation for the Lasallian association is a complex process. It cannot be reduced to the simple acquisition of knowledge or intellectual grasp of a series of historical or doctrinal elements. Its objective is to facilitate the assimilation of the elements that constitute Lasallian identity. It also implies the accompaniment of persons in its process of discovery and growth in that identity, and to share the life and the spirituality with other Lasallians.

2. In three dimensions.

The purpose of the formation is to help people to discover the following dimensions, to experience them and grow in them:

- One's own personal, human and spiritual journey, its significance in the light of the life's journey of John Baptist de La Salle and, within that journey, communion with the other Lasallians.
- The mission, always connected to the educational service to the poor, in the light of the Lasallian charism.
- Communion as the dedication of one's life to the mission. In this perspective we can understand Lasallian association as the commitment which unites us in solidarity before God, and with other Lasallians to serve the poor through education.

3. With an accompaniment that finds each one at his proper level.

Ideally, the intent of Lasallian formation is to encounter each person in the place and at the stage in which we find them, to help them to advance in the direction pointed out by the three dimensions mentioned above, always with respect for the identity of the individual. For this, Lasallian formation requires the accompaniment of persons and groups grounded in the reality of life and, as far as possible, development at diverse levels, with programs of basic principles and initiation. In addition, there ought to be more advanced programs for more committed persons or who wish to become so, and further programs still for those already committed in association.

The Founder

1. John Baptist de La Salle, Founder.

John Baptist de La Salle is considered a “Founder,” not only by the Brothers, but by other persons, consecrated and lay, who refer to him as “*our Founder*.” This recognition is due not only as a sign of affection, but because of an objective reason, since “*The Spirit of God has given to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle,*” according to article number 20 of the Rule, “*a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators.*” Such recognition goes together with the acceptance of John Baptist de La Salle as a life teacher and spiritual guide. His evangelical life journey and his writings are a customary meeting point.

Considering John Baptist de La Salle as a “Founder” is equivalent to affirming that he had a charism that allowed him *to discover, discern, and to appreciate* the basic aspects of reality that are up to us to live out. Based on that charism, in the Church there has begun a journey in which many of us find ourselves and upon which we travel as a type of vocation. That journey, until recently, has been identified with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; nevertheless, today, with the concept of Church–Communion, we see that that journey allows for diverse structures and ways of traveling it.

2. The Founding Energy of John Baptist de La Salle.

The current Rule of the Brothers states: “*John Baptist de La Salle was deeply moved by the way in which ‘the children of the artisans and the poor’ were abandoned and left to themselves. As a practical response to his prayerful consideration of this fact in relation to God’s plan of salvation, he came to discern, in faith, what God wanted the mission of the Institute to be*” (Rule 11).

The first thing that the Rule makes us take note of is that there is continual movement between the experience of faith and the call that John Baptist received through the charism. The second thing is that the center of gravity is, not in the Institute, but *in the mission*. This comes before the Institute in every sense.

What does this “discovery of the mission” by John Baptist de La Salle mean?

- He is aware of an external reality: *the situation of abandonment...*
- An inner awareness: *he came to discern...God's saving plan.*
- Result: John Baptist ends up by being “*deeply moved*” by that reality, he “*discovers*” it as a call from God and *he responds*. It is the action of the Spirit in John Baptist by means of the charism confided to him.

That charism, which we inherit from him, allows him to discover the Christian education of children, especially of the poor, *as the privileged place of the presence and the growth of the Kingdom*. Thanks also to that charism, he appreciates that work *as a ministry of great importance in the Church*.

Finally, the Founder carries his *personal* charism with him to search for a concrete response: of possible *ways* to devote himself to this mission, De La Salle cultivates and develops one way, that of the “*Brothers,*” consecrated celibates who live in a community for a mission; and he experiences another one, that of the “*rural teachers,*” lay persons who carry out their work almost isolated from him, but who John Baptist manages to gather together once in a while to encourage them in their ministry.

As we can see, the consistency of this concrete response comes from the charism that unfolds in the steps previously described.

Today, the responses that originate from the same charism are more varied, since they correspond to new situations, unimaginable in De La Salle’s time, which is the collaboration between Brothers and other men and women religious, lay persons, priests, but also with believers of other religions. Therefore, the Rule of the Brothers tells us in the final point: “*Today, as in the past, he challenges the Brothers, not only as the one who established the Institute, but as the Founder who continues to inspire and to sustain it*” (Rule 149).

3. Founder of the Brothers

“*The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is the first form of association desired by St. John Baptist de La Salle*” (43rd General Chapter, Circular 447, page 3). The Brothers are rightly considered to be the first heirs of John Baptist de La Salle and his charism. The Brothers overall, and each community in particular, continue to represent in a special way the Lasallian enterprise begun by their Founder, since they embody it in the way that comes the closest to that which John Baptist de La Salle set in motion.

This reference of the Brothers to John Baptist de La Salle makes them responsible in a special way, within the Lasallian Family, for three roles, although they do not belong to the Brothers exclusively:

- They must be the *heart of the charism within the Lasallian Family*, by their clear preference for the poor, by being mediators of God's light for the companions in the Lasallian mission, helping them to discover the meaning and the value of their educational efforts, by communicating the experience of fraternity and by promoting the spirituality of communion throughout the Lasallian Family.
- They must be the *memory of the Lasallian charism*. A liturgical memory that brings up to date the charismatic experiences of the Founder and the first Brothers, a living memory that establishes the connection between our foundational roots and the current situation of Lasallian Association in the Church and the world today.
- They must be the *guarantors of the charism in the enterprise and the Lasallian Family*, as they make Association the central axis of their identity and as they live it as consecration.

Founding story

1. Founding Story.

"...Our founding story, the story of how we came to be and how we began to experience and perceive ourselves as original, different, and distinct" (Brother John Johnston, Superior General, Pastoral Letter of January 1, 2000 *"The Challenge: Live Today Our Founding Story,"* page 12).

"Founding story" is an idea that is linked to identity, charism, the reason for existence for a group or a people, which in our case is the Lasallian Family, and within it the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Our "founding story" is a set and invariable point, a compass, to which we refer frequently to guide ourselves on a map where the other points seem to change.

The story of our origins reveals our identity, it describes us, it says what our values are, why and for whom we exist. It should not be understood as a "model to copy" or to try to imitate mechanically, but as a source of inspiration and discernment that enlightens our present and helps us to

interpret it. “We need to allow the power of our founding story and the La Salle’s interpretation of it to form, challenge, and inspire us. Renewed vision, commitment, and dynamism will emerge from such meditation. We will come to understand the meaning of creative fidelity and we will make it a reality” (Brother John Johnston, *ibidem*, page 19).

2. Initial Myth.

“Initial myth” is an idea that is interchangeable with that of “founding story,” but it adds or subtracts some characteristics, such as we find in current biblical exegesis or in psychology.

First of all, this term needs to be separated from the idea of “myth” that we find in literature, as a fictional tale for entertainment.

The term “myth” underscores the unity of the entire founding story, and it cannot be broken apart by isolated anecdotes. In a mythical narrative, each part of the story must be read in connection with the other parts, and each part must be understood in light of the whole.

A “myth” places concern for the historical exactitude of each separate event or the relationship of historical persons with those events within the narrative in second place, and in first place is the meaning or the message for us. In a certain sense, the myth recovers the story, which, as such, is past and it refers to persons from the past, and it changes it into “our story,” a mirror in which we can contemplate and understand ourselves. Therefore, the expression of the myth or initial story is done with different accents, according to the current moment and circumstances that are used to read the story.

The “*initial myth*” of our Lasallian story is the narrative of our origins, which goes beyond anecdotal stories because it has to do with life experiences that are related to a plot in which the Holy Spirit has had a direct role. Our “*initial myth*” is the narrative of how the Lasallian charism entered the story, of how the collective identity of the “Brothers of the Christian Schools” came about; and, from today’s current perspective, we could add how the collective Lasallian identity came about. In our initial myth we find the meaning of our identity, that which allows us to feel that we are part of the world and of the Church but with something special; something special that enriches the overall group.

3. Foundation Event.

When we speak of the founding story or the initial myth we can point to certain events that have special importance overall, they are like joints that reinforce the continuity of the lineal narrative series of events, or light sources that illuminate and help one to understand the overall picture. Our collective identity is seen in these events, rooted and founded in a special way. They are “*foundation events*”.

Referring to our Lasallian founding story we can identify the Vow of Association of 1691 (November 21, John Baptist de La Salle and two Brothers) and that of 1694 (June 6, John Baptist de La Salle and twelve Brothers) as two scenes of the same *foundation event* that has come to be the “center of gravity” of our initial myth.

The General Chapter of 2000, in reading our founding story, called to the attention of all Lasallians the exceptional importance of that event: “*The foundation event which links the Institute today to its origins is that of June 6, 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*” (43rd General Chapter, Circular 447, page 2).

Identity (Lasallian identity)

1. Identity and charism.

Lasallian identity is a charismatic way to live communion for the mission. When we say “charismatic way” we mean to say that this identity is lived as a vocation, with the gift that is received from the Holy Spirit. Here we speak of the Lasallian charism, in reference to John Baptist de La Salle, the person in whom this charism came into being in the Church.

Guided or inspired by the Lasallian charism, those who share in this identity develop a communion as a lay fraternity at the service of the educational mission for the poor.

Lasallian identity is a dynamic factor with which an individual is progressively molded and acquires a *persona* with himself and with the others with whom he lives. Each one takes on an identity that best suits him, but always with certain common traits that we can call “collective identity”, one that permits the individual to be recognized among so-called

“Lasallians” as one of their own. He is likewise recognized from outside by his certain way of being, of living, of acting, of teaching. It embodies a series of values which speak of certain priorities, and criteria which he projects in and through the mission.

2. The three essential dimensions.

Lasallian identity can be described in various ways, according to the cultures, and based on the different perspectives. However, there are certain dimensions which, in one form or another, are always present. We call them “dimensions” because they are intertwined and lend themselves to more or less growth.

- Let us begin with the **missionary dimension**: Lasallian identity was born in the Church as a response to the educational needs of the poor and, with them, of children and youth in general. Lasallian identity develops in accord with the experience of being an educator, which ought not be confused with being a teacher, nor do they go together necessarily. It is the experience of being a mediator in the development and growth of those who benefit directly from our mission. These beneficiaries of the mission are recognized following guidelines which seek out, among children and youth, those who need us the most, the poorest.
- The **community dimension** is, in all likelihood, the most attractive characteristic of Lasallian identity insofar as it brings out the charismatic side of the response to the mission of education. The community, in its diverse forms, is the womb of Lasallian identity. It is there that the Spirit communicates its charism, where Lasallians share their faith and their experience of God, where they discern together the signs by which God speaks to them, where they hear the voices that reach them from the mission, and where they ponder how to answer those calls. The community is also the way in which we educate, the manner in which we present our educational establishments and organize their direction and management. The Lasallian community underscores the bonds of brotherhood, not of hierarchy; it puts the accent on the relationship of closeness and solidarity of the members of the community and those for whom the mission has been created.
- The **religious or transcendent dimension** imparts their most profound motivation to the two previous dimensions. Through this as-

pect, the person sees himself to be an instrument at the service of God's work and as a mediator for the salvation that God is bringing to fruition in children and youth. From this perspective, Lasallian identity can be defined as a special or charismatic participation in the communion of the Trinity, that is, a missionary communion. This dimension can be lived out in an especially meaningful way as a consecrated religious, which, in its turn, serves to make the two previous dimensions more radical and significant.

Lasallian (person)

Broadly: A "Lasallian" is a person who considers himself or herself as being in relationship of belonging with the Lasallian family or Lasallian institutions. That sense of belonging can be simply an affective one, or it could also be simply an institutional one. In this sense all former students are called "Lasallians" as well as all persons who make up Lasallian institutions, independent of the degree of to which they have integrated the Lasallian spirit.

In the strict sense: "Lasallian" refers to a way of being teacher, Christian, believer... in reference to John Baptist de La Salle, and therefore it designates the person who participates in the Lasallian mission based the Lasallian spirit. In the measure in which they themselves do not become protagonists of the mission based on the Lasallian charism, then this does not apply to the beneficiaries of the mission.

The ambivalent use of this term is frequent in the double sense that has been pointed out. It can be said that both meanings are legitimate, but it would be appropriate to specify in context which of the two meanings is being used.

Lay – Consecrated Layperson

1. Etymology of "lay":

The etymology of the term "lay" clarifies an important aspect of the concept for us. It comes from the Greek "*laos*", which means "people". *Lay*, etymologically, means "*one who belongs to the people*".

2. Meaning of lay (French: laïc. Spanish: laico / seglar).

The word “lay” takes on a different meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. Within the social context, “lay” has frequently been used in contrast to “ecclesial” or “religious” (in this sense one speaks of “lay power” in contrast to “religious power”). In the 19th century and for a good part of the 20th, in the entire Western world, the concept of “lay” had a strong accusatory character in reference to all concerning the Church and religious symbols. This “lay” tendency was especially marked in France, and is still very present in the French legal system and culture.

Within the ecclesial context, “lay” represents the identity of a Christian, without anything added; “lay” is that which pertains to the Christian people, and more specifically, the Christian who does not belong to the hierarchy. It includes, therefore, those religious women and men who are not priests (like the Brothers). In this case it is a positive concept that is being treated, not an accusatory one. Frequently, always depending on the context, the term is used to designate all persons, including those who belong to other religions and non-believers, excluding priests and religious.

The Spanish word “seglar” has a meaning more restrictive than that of “lay”, always excluding religious and priests. It appears only in an ecclesial context. The French equivalent, “seculier”, has fallen into disuse. It is always translated into English as lay.

3. “Consecrated layperson”:

“Lay consecrated” is the layperson, who marks him or herself in relation to God, by means of a ritual or public act (“consecration”), without been part of the hierarchy or priesthood. This is the case of a Christian Brother, who has always himself been a “lay religious”.

Ministry

1. The Ecclesial Concept of Ministry

“Ministry” is the carrying out of an ecclesial mission according to a recognized charism, approved and sanctioned by the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ.

“The ministries which exist and are at work at this time in the Church are all, even in their variety of forms, a participation in Jesus Christ’s

own ministry as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (cf. John 10:11), the humble servant who gives himself without reserve for the salvation of all (cf. Mark 10:45) (Christifideles Laici, 21.3).

Over the course of centuries, up until the Second Vatican Council, this term was used in the Church almost exclusively to denote “*priestly ministry*”. Beginning with Vatican II, other types of ministries were recovered, specifically *lay ministries*.

Priestly ministry is derived from Holy Orders (ChL 22.1). Lay ministries have their foundation in Baptism and Confirmation (ChL 23.2).

2. Ministry and Mission.

“Ministry” and “Mission” are sometimes used in a hazy or indifferent sense, one substituting for the other. In reality, there is a clear distinction although they are closely related: *ministry* is the way of carrying out the *mission*, based on a determined *charism* and recognition on the part of the corresponding ecclesial authority; therefore, one can participate in the same *mission* from different *ministries*. For example, we can speak about the educational mission and about ministries that are carry out or serve that mission based on different charisms.

Ministry is realized through different *tasks*, but without being identified with them. For example, the fact that someone distributes communion or explains the Gospel at Mass does not necessarily imply that one is carrying out the priestly ministry or that of a deacon, even though those tasks are normally associated with these ministries. In the same way, teaching or leading a group of catechesis is not the same, by themselves, as carrying out Lasallian ministry.

3. Ministry and Ministerial Identity.

Ministry gives rise to an *identity: to be a minister* carries with it a way of life, a spirituality, a type of relating socially...

The “minister,” whether a person or a ministry group, becomes a sign of the mission, for other and for themselves. He or she or the group develops a ministerial role for the community and they live identified with the ministry, which has become for them an *experience* which shapes their lives since it tends to influence all important aspects of their lives.

Therefore, the ministry, whatever it is in the Church, has two inseparable facets:

- that which has to do with carrying out a portion of the ecclesial mission, in specific tasks;
- and that which has to do with the person of the minister; the person tends to be shaped by and for that ecclesial mission.

Therefore, we say that the ministry gives rise to a *ministerial identity*, and this is never equivalent to a set of tasks to be done.

4. Lasallian Ministry.

This is a particular way of living and carrying out the educational mission, inspired in the Lasallian charism. The center of this mission is clearly defined as *evangelization and the educational service of the poor*. Starting from this center, the mission expands in concentric circles in order to reach out primarily to children and young people. It should not be forgotten that the mission that has to do with Lasallian ministry is, really, a part of the overall mission of the Church, and between that part and the overall mission there are no defined borders or limits.

The theological foundation of the Lasallian ministry is expressed by Saint John Baptist de La Salle in his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

5. The Lasallian Ministry of the Brother.

Within the overall Lasallian ministry we can talk about the specific ministry of the Brother or, more exactly, of “the Brothers” since this is a ministry that is done “*together and by association*,” not individually.

The Decree of Approbation of the Rule of 1987 briefly highlight, and at the same time distinguish, the mission to which the Brothers are called, the same mission to which the entire Lasallian Family is committed, “*to provide a human and Christian education for young people especially the poor*,” the Brothers carry out this mission “*according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to them*,” that is to say, “*consecrated to God as lay religious*,” and living the charism that the Decree summarize later in three sentences, but which the Rule will develop: “*They endeavor to look upon everything with the eyes of faith, they share in community the experience of God, and they fulfil ‘together and by association’ their service of evangelization, principally in schools.*”

By this specific ministry the Brothers are a sign for the entire Lasallian Family of the mission and the charism that have been entrusted to the whole Family.

6. Ministerial Community, Ministerial Fraternity.

Each Christian community has its reason for existence in the evangelizing mission, just like the Church overall does (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). Some Christian communities are, in addition, strongly characterized and revitalized by a special charism. In virtue of that charism the Church has entrusted a ministry to them. This is the case of the community of the Brothers, and, starting from them, of the *Lasallian community*.

The Lasallian community is a ministerial community, dedicated to the educational service of the poor based on the Lasallian charism. The ministry gives to this community its special identity within the Church and this identity shapes it both internally and externally.

The concept “ministerial fraternity” is equivalent to that of “ministerial community,” but it stresses the fraternal relationship between the members of the community, which is a prophetic aspect of the Lasallian charism. It can refer both to the local community as well as to the overall set of communities that are united in the same charism.

The members of a ministerial community can carry out very diverse tasks; some members may even be unable to do any external mission due to infirmity or age. The ministry is not linked to a concrete task. It is the joint community/fraternity that carries out the ministry and to that ministry they contribute the diverse roles of its members, including prayer, the suffering of the sick, the solidarity of the members with one another...

7. Other Particular Uses of the Term “Ministry.”

The basic concept, in theological and ecclesiological terms, of the term “ministry” and its correlative noun “minister,” according to what we have presented here, can be considered to be similar in French, Spanish, and English. Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep in mind certain particular uses of the term itself that may lead to confusion when they are translated mechanically from one language to another.

In the French and Spanish-speaking world the use of this word in the Lasallian context is rather restricted, and, as a whole, it usually denotes the

development and the living out of the Lasallian mission, according to what was described in the above sections. This is not the case in the English-speaking world, where it is commonly used with other meanings: to denote particular *functions* such as leading vocational pastoral ministry, being the religious head of an educational work or leadership of a community, but also it refers to the *works* or *educational centers* in which the Lasallian mission is carried out.

Partners

1. Those who share the mission.

Partners, Partenaires (French), Colaboradores (Spanish): These three terms designate, each in its own language, the overall group of persons who participate in the Lasallian mission in very diverse ways. The distinctive characteristic is participation in the mission, and not simply an affective relationship or a religious devotion. We should note also that it is a term used from the point of view of the Institute of the Brothers. The 43rd General Chapter referred to them in this way: “*There are Partners who in fact share our mission in its multiple educational, catechetical, apostolic and professional aspects, and make it possible for the mission to be accomplished*” (Circular 447, p. 4).

2. A journey to be made.

Apart from these linguistic differences, there does seem to be general acceptance of the distinction made between this overall group and that of the associates, not because of a border between them, but because associates are partners (*partenaires /colaboradores*) who, after a *long record of collaborating in the Lasallian mission*, “*feel a call to deepen the charism, spirituality and Lasallian communion in which they wish to participate*” (Circular 447, p. 4) and they can decide to do this in a formal way. It is not then, a border to cross, but a journey to be made.

The poor (The educational service of)

1. The poor, our topmost priority.

“*From its foundation, the Institute has defined itself as being called by God*

to the educational service of the poor” (Circular 447, p. 18). So begins the chapter devoted to Mission in the Acts of the 43rd General Chapter, leaving no doubt as to who are to be the principal beneficiaries of the mission of the Institute.

It is not sufficient, nor is it historically certain, to say that our justification is the education of children and youth. The primary and fundamental justification of our Lasallian educational mission lies with the poor. This was the choice made from our beginnings.

Neither does the original Rule of the Institute permit us to wonder about who were to be the favored beneficiaries of this Institute, nor about the reason for which we were founded, nor on the importance of this ministry (Rule of 1718, chap. 1, numbers 4-5):

“The necessity of this Institute is very great because the working class and the poor, being usually little instructed and occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their children cannot give them the instruction they need and a respectable and Christian education.

“It was to procure this advantage for the children of the working class and of the poor that the Christian Schools were established.”

The term “poor” is not an absolute concept but rather one that acquires real meaning only when placed in a social context, and therefore it does not have the same equivalency when applied in the context of the Third World (developing countries), or used in a moral or affective context. Nevertheless, it can generally be stated that the “poor” are the person who are affected by some “situation of poverty”, and for that reason it is understood to mean, not simply a lack or a need, but a human limitation that hinders in a relatively serious way, the full development or maturation of a person, or one that unfairly deprives him of what society can offer due to economic, intellectual, affective, physical or psychological poverty.

The “Declaration of the Brother in the Modern World”, produced by the 39th General Chapter (1966-67), recognized the diversity of poverties but at the same time stressed that it is material poverty which requires our special attention, without excluding the others, and justifies that in this way: “It is clear that there is a poverty of intelligence, a poverty of affection and a poverty of faith; often the poorest of all are those who have no family, are in poor health, or cannot adjust socially. All of this calls for our study and educational service. But it remains no less true that these

forms of poverty are generally rooted in the poverty which is material and economic.” (D 29,3)

2. The option for the poor.

Singling out the poor as the principal beneficiaries of our mission, is not just devoting special time or energy to them but truly making them to be our preferential option, whatever may be the social context in which we find them (cf. Rule, 40). We can express it in this way: the option for the poor builds a direction and a perspective into our way of seeing things:

- *A direction we look toward*: Upon finding oneself with a group of persons to whom one is being sent, the group of students, for example, whatever the social class to which they belong, the viewpoint of the educator has built into it a dynamic that makes him seek out among the group those who are most impacted by limitations or the poverities of whatever kind: economic, affective, psychological, intellectual, moral, etc. He goes on to set his priorities and the dedication of his time and energies accordingly.
- *A perspective or point of view* to look upon reality. The educator presents a social and historical reality to his students, but, from what perspective? To teach using the prism of the option for the poor is a different way of regarding reality, whomsoever may be the immediate subjects of our instruction, and consciously intends to awaken solidarity with the least fortunate in their hearts.

3. An essential characteristic of the Lasallian charism.

The preferential option for the poor is not only a characteristic that the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools ought to pursue but it is proper and essential to the Lasallian charism to such a degree that no institution or group that considers itself to be “Lasallian” can be excused from that pursuit.

The direction we look toward, which we alluded to above, should be incorporated by every Lasallian educator on the personal level, but likewise each community, each district and the entire institution, all of them in the area of their competence. The way we see things will determine where we focus and on whom we will dedicate our most careful analyses, our greatest efforts, our most capable persons and the renovation of our schools.

In the same way, the perspective we use in teaching must affect every Lasallian teacher in particular and be communicated as far as possible to all those who share the educational mission. But it must also be a defining characteristic of each and every one of our educational programs, of every academic projection. And it should become an essential criterion at the moment of the evaluation of our educational works. The 43rd General Chapter proposed these three characteristics permitting us to identify a school as Lasallian in what refers to service to the poor through education:

- adopting an educational programme on justice and solidarity which will give a specific direction to the activities undertaken, to the experiences proposed to the young people, and to the kind of relationships that are built up;
- thinking of ways (facilities, and pedagogical strategies) to make these centres accessible and effective for young people in difficulty;
- creating ways so that poor youth and their families feel welcome and at ease in our institutions. (Circular 447, pp. 19-20)

Refoundation

This concept is used today generally in the context of Religious Congregations³, and it is usually understood as the process of recovering the charismatic roots (or founding charism) in order to develop them in the new socio-ecclesial “ecosystem.”

This goes beyond the simple “renewal” that was spoken about so much in the years that followed the Second Vatican Council. It is related to the conviction that we are living within a changing historic cycle. Ecclesial points of reference have changed as has the inter-relationship of ecclesial identities, and the place that religious life occupies in this new context.

“Refoundation” is presented to the Institute of the Brothers as the challenge to find its place within the framework of the new Lasallian Association, in the context of Church-Communion. We are not dealing here, as some have incorrectly interpreted, with inventing another Institute, dis-

³ The Union of Superiors General dedicated its 54th Assembly (November of 1998) to a reflection on the theme of refoundation and singled it out as a challenge that the Religious Life must assume. The title chosen for the Assembly is significant: “*For a Creative Fidelity: REFOUNDED*” (See Acts of the Assembly in the book by the same title, Editions Il Calamo, Roma 1998).

tinct from the one founded by John Baptist de La Salle, but rather of assuming the creative dynamism of the charism following the inspiration and example of the Founder as the Rule of the Brothers states in its very last number: “*The life of an Institute is a continual challenge to be creative while remaining faithful to its origins. It can sometimes call for difficult commitments, as John Baptist de La Salle discovered at various points in his life. Today, as in the past, he challenges the Brothers, not only as the one who established the Institute but as the Founder who continues to inspire and to sustain it.*” (Rule 149).

Today the Institute is developing its mission along with many other persons and groups that also incarnate the Lasallian charism in various forms. It is for that reason that we must constantly ask which are the new and which the traditional modalities of the presence and activity of the Brothers in the field of education for the purpose of providing effective answers, but even more tellingly, giving responses to the present day exigencies.

Spirit of Faith

1. “Spirit”.

The term “spirit” can have very different meanings but when we employ it in the expression “spirit of faith” we make reference to a life principal, the force and the dynamism that impel us in our way of acting, the essential frame of mind that defines us and the final justification of all we do.

The spirit that breathes life into every Christian, every family or Christian community, is a particular manifestation of the Spirit who did the same for Jesus, i.e., the Holy Spirit. In the same way, He gives life to Lasallians: when La Salle said “*the spirit of this institute is the spirit of faith*” (Rule of 1718, 2.2), he was speaking of that force produced by the Holy Spirit, the “*Spirit of God*”, the “*Spirit of Jesus Christ*”, he names it as well at different occasions. It is the One who “*places us in conditions of not living nor acting except motivated by his impulse*” (Med. for Sundays 43,1) It is the force that permeates every person, and not just in partial aspects: “*for it is this spirit that should animate all their actions, be the motive of their whole conduct*” (Rule of 1718, 2,1).

2. Spirit of faith.

From the very start John Baptist de La Salle named the spirit of faith as the spirit of the Institute that he founded and he defined it by its effects for it is that spirit which must induce the Brothers “*not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but with a view of God and to attribute all to God*” (Rule 1718, 2.2).

It is God who is the protagonist or initiator in our history in the concept of the spirit of faith. It can be considered at the “key of interpretation” that de La Salle invites us to use in order to comprehend and guide our life. It is also the key that he used to relate to us the story of our foundational history. The “Memoire of the Beginnings” speaks of God as the One who “*conducts all things with wisdom and gentleness...*” And the Meditations for the Time of Retreat sets off by relating that it is God, “*who wills that all of us come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved*” (MTR 193.1). Therefore it is He who has established the Christian Schools (MTR 194.1). And at the heart of that story the Founder presents God to us as “Communion”, Father, Son and Spirit, associating us with God’s salvific mission (MTR 201).

This is not meant to be a passive interpretation, as for someone who is looking on from the outside, but it profoundly involves us in the narrative itself and this introduces the other face of the spirit of faith, that is, *zeal* (Rule 1718, 2.9). Zeal is the manifestation of faith and forms an inseparable part of the same and of the one spirit. The spirit of faith roots us firmly in the *Work of God* and causes us to feel that we are *instruments* of God in his work. He is the One who sends us to youth and He sends youth to our encounter (cf Meds. for Sunday, 37).

The spirit of faith imparts a “sacramental” view to our eyes, that is to say, it makes them capable of penetrating “through” the outward appearances of our students to discover their transcendence, that dimension which makes each person infinitely valuable because it refers him to God Himself.

The spirit of faith also gives our eyes the ability to see as God sees, whose instruments we are. We contemplate the reality of the poor, of the child and the young person, with the merciful glance of God and the trustfulness of God Himself in the potentiality of the person, of each student, to grow and be renewed.

3. The Lasallian Spirit.

The Lasallian Community, the Institute in its origins and today the ensemble of Lasallian associates and partners, is alive and growing in the mission to the degree to which it is consciously acquiring the spirit that animates it and the need it has to possess that spirit in order to give an efficacious response to the mission and the importance of the community to be faithful to the mission. It also shows how the community may become a useless structure when the spirit is missing. The spirit of faith is not a theoretical concept. When we refer to it in the Lasallian context we place it in the existential field established by the two poles of our identity: communion and mission. It is then when we can say that the Lasallian spirit is the spirit of faith lived in communion for the mission, or more concretely, in association for the mission of the education of the poor.

We cannot speak in the abstract of the “Lasallian spirit”, outside of the community and the mission, since it is born (“gifted” by the Holy Spirit) for the purpose of the Lasallian mission and is nurtured and develops in the framework of the community.

Spirituality (Lasallian Spirituality)

1. Spirituality:

Spirituality is a way of living a particular “spirit” and to express it. Put in other words, it is the expression of the profound sense of what we live. This “profound sense” is not always linked to the religious or to the divine, but to the values that persons deem important and upon which they base their style of life and their most decisive choices. The term “spirituality”, therefore, can have a scope which is simply “humanistic or secular”, apart from the religious.

2. Religious Spirituality:

The term “spirituality” takes on a religious meaning when the “profound sense” that it expresses makes reference to God. In this case we can add that “spirituality” is also the manner we have of relating to God, grounded on our lived experience, the experience of our educational task, our human relationships, our perception of history and social reality...

3. Christian Spirituality:

Christian spirituality expresses the profound sense of life and relation with God stemming from the experience of Jesus, the center of whose being was that of a filial relationship with his Father and of the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection. The spirituality of every Christian attempts to reproduce the experience of Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit, in the particular situation of each one. Christian spirituality is developed in a system of relations that have Jesus as their source: the relation with the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the relation with the world, viewed as the Kingdom of God; the relation with all other human persons, seen as children of God and our brothers; the relation with the Church as the Body of Christ...

4. Lasallian Spirituality:

This is a way of living Christian spirituality with the special perspective or dimension imparted by the Lasallian charism. It is not an “extra” added to the Christian spirituality. It would be absurd, therefore, to ask the question that we sometimes hear, “For a Lasallian, what comes first, Christian spirituality or Lasallian spirituality?” This dichotomy is based on the supposition that there are two spiritualities when, in reality, there is but one Christian spirituality lived according to a specific all-embracing perspective. The Lasallian spirituality, like the Carmelite, or Franciscan, or Salesian, etc., is a form of living the ecclesial communion for the mission. It makes its own emphases within the overall Christian spirituality according to the mission that it serves.

Lasallian spirituality helps us to discover and to live our work of education as the privileged place of the educator in relation to God. Lasallian spirituality develops as a “*spirituality of mediation*”, for it shows us how we ourselves are *instruments* in God’s work, as *mediators* of his work of salvation with the young, *ministers and representatives* of Jesus Christ, the *living word* of God for those to whom we are sent...

At the central core of Lasallian spirituality we enshrine the spirit of faith (or, if you prefer, the expression “*spirit of faith and of zeal*”). We can state then that founded on this nucleus, or generated by it, Lasallian spirituality is constituted. Motivated by the spirit of faith, we can discover God and see how he reveals himself to us in the field of the mission we have re-

ceived. Thanks to the spirit of faith, we can read our daily life as the story of salvation and find in God the ultimate meaning of all that we do.

The core Christian experience is the experience of the love of God. Lived in the spirit of faith and zeal for the mission confided to us, Lasallian spirituality grows and waxes strong as it fills up with names, with stories, with life and places and symbols. We find ourselves much more at home in specific ways of prayer, or we see ourselves more clearly reflected in certain biblical passages.

5. The Spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle:

The spirituality that today we call “Lasallian” is not identical to the personal spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle. The experience of the Founder is marked by his own temperament, formation and personal psychology, by the culture of the era in which he lived, France of the 17th and 18th centuries, and by the Sulpician School of Spirituality in which he was formed. All these traits cannot be transferred to another time and place, nor to a different person. All that being said, Lasallian spirituality does have its roots in the spiritual experience of John Baptist de La Salle. It is necessary to connect with that experience if one wishes to share in the spirituality.

Throughout his life’s journey, John Baptist de La Salle would discover the image of the living God involved in human history, providentially working for the salvation of humankind and, most concretely, for “*the children of artisans and the poor*”. With this God who, “*guides their steps without forcing them*”, de La Salle carried on an impassioned dialogue during his entire life. One attitude stood out in this dialogue, that of *self-offering and abandonment* into God’s hands, which had its immediate echo in a second attitude, that of knowing himself to be *an instrument* in the hands of God to contribute to God’s salvific work.

Trusting abandonment to God and devotion to his work—that is the most meaningful experience of faith in two facets which have come down to us in the time-honored synthesis, *the spirit of faith and zeal*.

6. A Non-Christian Lasallian Spirituality?

The recent and growing phenomenon of non-Christian educators who claim a Lasallian identity and, consequently, participation in the Lasallian

spirituality, gives rise to the question: can we speak of a Lasallian spirituality that is not Christian? The question may be posed in its most existential form: can a Lasallian spirituality serve a non-Christian person to express the “profound sense” of his life and his relationship with God?

We can respond to this question by looking at two different perspectives:

The first perspective is grounded on the internal structure of Lasallian spirituality which, as we have said, is a way of living the Christian spirituality.

- There is in this a first stratum that is essentially human or “humanistic”. It refers, for example, to the absolute worth of the person of the student, beyond any of the possible qualities or defects that he/she may have, and whose needs are paramount in their call upon the educator. Lasallian spirituality underscores the mystery of the person which is capable of rising above his/her present reality, is gifted with liberty and is capable of choosing between good and evil. Lasallian spirituality brings out the relation of solidarity in which the students must be educated and the special attention that the poorest among them deserves. Lasallian spirituality presents the educator as mediator in the integral development of the student and reminds the educator that his most important contribution to the education of the child does not consist in a theoretical body of knowledge but in a way to live which is transmitted by example more than by words.
- The second stratum of Lasallian spirituality imparts religious meaning to the previous one and reveals the relation of the person of the student and the person of the educator with God. Each Lasallian translates into his own religious categories the mediation assumed by the educator and equally the mystery and the interiority of the person, the work of salvation that God effects through us and the special concern for the poorest...
- The third stratum subsumes the previous two and interprets them in the light of the salvation history that we find in Scripture and in the light of the paschal mystery of Christ. At this level we find in their full meaning the typical concepts of Lasallian spirituality such as “*God’s work*”, “*ministers and ambassadors of Christ*”, persons made responsible for the salvation of our students, “*being clothed with the spirit of Jesus Christ*”, etc.

The second perspective brings us closer to the root of spirituality and it raises a substantial broadening of what we previously called Lasallian spirituality when we presented it as a “Christian spirituality.”

- We start by stating reality: many persons who come from other religions and forms of humanism, when they come into contact with value systems or schools of spirituality that have Christian roots, such as the case of Lasallian spirituality, can feel very much at home with them because they find them to be faithful reflections or manifestations of many of the values and meanings to life that are also present, explicit or implicitly, in their own religion. Lasallian spirituality is for many non-Christian educators a means to be better believers in their own religion or humanistic beliefs. It is for all Lasallians a point of encounter and a source of common understandings for the mission that we share.
- The above statement leads us the reflections of the Second Vatican Council, which stated that the “Seeds of the Word” (*Ad Gentes*, 11.2, 15.1) are to be found in other cultures and in other religions. Many of the elements that we Christians identify with the message of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, are already in seminal form in other cultures and religions, and we can recognize them as well in non-Christian persons.
- We take a further step toward the roots: spirituality refers us to the charism that give it origin and, through it, to the Holy Spirit, who bestows it upon us. This is the root in which we find the definitive justification concerning why we are able to refer to the Lasallian spirituality of other believers who are non-Christians, or to the Lasallian charism that is embraced by non-Christian Lasallians. The Spirit of God, which “blows where it will” (John 3: 8), bestows its gifts not only to Christians but also to believers from other religions.
- The Lasallian charism makes us mediators of God’s salvation for the young, especially the poor, by means of education that seeks the full realization of the person and his integration in his relationship with God. In the Christian context, we have expressed the central object of our Lasallian mission in these terms: “human and Christian education”; whereas in pluri-religious contexts the tendency is to say: “human an spiritual education.”

- The “Lasallian” charism, as the adjective indicates, has been made manifest first of all by means of De La Salle and his immediate disciples, and logically, this gave rise to a spirituality that was clearly Christian, that is to say, it was centered in Christ as the Sacrament of universal salvation which God offers to all humanity. But this does not mean that it is the only way of expressing the spirituality which the charism provokes in those who receive it. The believers of other religions will find, in their own religious traditions (which are paths of salvation for those who follow them) other ways of expressing the life to which the charism gives rise, and surely also they will feel that they can identify with many of the expressions of spirituality that came into being in the first Lasallian context, the Christian context.

Let us draw some conclusions for our current reality. This new situation asks us, on the one hand, about considering those expressions of Lasallian spirituality that might be common ones for Lasallians from different religions and that may permit us to reference this spirituality as a point of encounter and common source of meaning for the mission which we share. But at the same time, Christian Lasallians must appreciate without fear all the Christocentric richness of their own spirituality, since it is within it where the depth of the charismatic experience embraced by John Baptist de La Salle is revealed to us.

Universality

Universality or “universal openness” is a Lasallian characteristic that the 43rd General Chapter includes among the five that serve as reference points to recognize those who seek to be associated: “*an openness of mind which makes it possible to see beyond the individual and his immediate environment*” (Circ. 447, p.5).

Universality situates itself on the double axis upon which Lasallian association is based, *mission and communion*, in the following way:

- *In regard to mission*, universality enables us to go beyond the immediate action and concrete structures in which the mission takes place, not allowing us to be dominated by the concrete circumstances surrounding a project, refusing to depend on the alleged success or failure of the project, as well as limiting the enthusiasm and the commitment to the specific beneficiaries of the project. All of this

because the person, enlightened by faith, has gone beyond the particular situation and feels called to be a participant in God's plan, in God's work. The person discovers himself to be an instrument in the service of this Work and with this universal perspective takes charge of the specific project because with it, he accomplishes the mission received from God here and now.

- *In regard to communion*, universality enables us to rise above the restrictions or bonds that tie the immediate community, such as personal outlooks, abilities and interests of the people involved, internal designs....not to renounce them, but rather to see them in view of a broader perspective, that is of *the communion for Lasallian mission*; other persons enter into this communion who have not been chosen, however they are joined as well to those whom we feel have been called together for the Lasallian mission. The bond of association highlights the authentic root and motivation of the community, which is mission. Thanks to this bond the community becomes *ministerial*: the responsibility which is taken on communally before God and the Church in regard to the mission (and of those projects in which the mission is accomplished) takes priority over personal interests or desires.

Volunteers

The word “volunteer”, in the Lasallian world, is used with different nuances, but always with this common element: it designates persons who serve the Lasallian mission with a posture of gratuity, that is, without receiving any payment for their work.

In certain districts “Lasallian Volunteers” are those who gratuitously give some of their time, more or less periodically and systematically (for example, a certain number of hours weekly), in accomplishing the Lasallian mission, especially in projects directed to the service of the poor. The age and profession of these “Lasallian Volunteers” tend to be very diverse, from young students to older persons to persons who have their own work or professional responsibilities not closely associated with educational works. They tend to be grouped in a district organization which offers gatherings and formation, not only in regard to their works but also to the Lasallian charism and spirituality.

In other districts, the term “Lasallian Volunteers” is used more specifically in regard to people (usually young persons who have just completed their higher education studies) who live out an integral experience of temporary association in the Lasallian mission, gratuitously, receiving only that which is necessary for their daily personal sustenance during the time which the experience lasts, usually an academic year or course of studies, renewable one or more times. The experience is lived and accompanied in community and enlivened by Lasallian spirituality. By its character and intensity, one can state that this type of experience especially favors the understanding of what is meant by Lasallian association, and the potential for a more lasting integration into it.

Frequently this expression is also used to name those who experience mission in a more limited time frame, usually about a month. In these situations the objectives are centered in such a way that the participants come to a knowledge of the mission and its beneficiaries, rather than in an experience of “association for the mission”.

The Vow of Association

1. The meaning of the Vow of Association in its foundational stage:

The importance of the Vow of Association in the whole Lasallian itinerary and as a central point of reference in Lasallian history was highlighted by the 43rd General Chapter (year 2000), in its statement:

“The original vow for the service of the poor which associated the Founder with twelve Brothers in 1694, is the source of Lasallian associations of lay persons and religious who wish to be part of the Lasallian mission. This is where new forms of association for the mission have their origin” (Circular 447, p.3).

Usually, when we refer to the original vow, it deals not only with one of the three vows stated in the formula of 1694, but to the unity of the three, for the reality is that each of these three vows explicitly manifests one aspect of the overall vow of association which is expressed in the second part of the formula: *“...I promise and vow to unite myself and to remain in society....”*

The Vow of Association expresses and ratifies the fraternal project which John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers had begun to live out in the twelve years before 1694. Externally nothing is added either to the mission or to the community. However internally *it places them in explicit reference to God himself*. For this reason the protagonists will experience a deeper force in moving the project forward.

Each person's commitment is not made in reference to the work of the schools but with the *Society*, that is, with the "Community for gratuitous schools." This characteristic essentially defines the Lasallian project: communion is the chosen medium in which the finality is to succeed; for this reason the emphasis is placed on the fraternal relationships among those who compose the Society, rather than on the specific apostolic ministry, even though this is to be its finality.

In synthesis, what our first Lasallian community, with its founder in the forefront, intuited was that what constituted the essential core of its consecrated life was *communion for the mission*, or more precisely: *fraternal ministry for the education of the poor*. They were convinced that they were contributing to procuring the glory of God as long as they dedicated themselves to building up this type of brotherhood which they had no qualms identifying as God's work. This ministerial fraternity is that which we in Lasallian terms know as *Association*. This was *the existential sign* which they were living with intensity, and it is also that which they convert into the *official sign* by their vow formula.

2. The meaning of the Vow of Association at the present time:

Particularly since 1986, a progressive growing interest in the Vow of Association is being experienced in the Institute of the Brothers, primarily with its explicit statement in the vow formula: *Association for the educational service of the poor*. This explicit vow had disappeared in the vow formula of 1726, even in the Bull of Approbation, though it had always been implicit in the core part of the vow formula.

In these past few years a process of reflection in the Institute is occurring to restore the Vow of Association to its core placement in the consecration and identity of the Brother. The 44th General Chapter (2007) made this restitution real as regards the formula of vows (cf. Circular 455, Topic 3, 1.3.2). This process is being effected with the help, on one hand, of the

timely reflection of the Church on its own identity, rediscovered as “communion for mission”; on the other hand, by the ever-growing knowledge of the journey of John Baptist de La Salle, his writings and thinking.

The Vow of Association for the educational service of the poor represents the unity of the Brother’s consecrated life: union with God, with his Brothers and with his students; three bonds where each one interacts with the other two.

The Vow expresses the intention of building up a fraternity which holds the educational service of the poor as its finality. It is the Lasallian charism of living the ecclesial vocation: a communion for the mission. This fraternity expands in concentric circles beginning from within the Brothers’ community and associates them with all who commit themselves to the educational service of the poor in the Lasallian charism.

The Vow of Association expresses the mission which motivates the consecration of the Brothers. The educational service of the poor is not simply an “apostolic activity”, but rather the finality, the essential motive for which the Brother consecrates himself, to respond to the needs of youth, poor and in need of salvation. The Vow also recalls that the community does not exist in and for itself, but rather is established in function of the mission.

The Vow of Association expresses the willingness of the Brother to embrace the mission, based on co-responsibility, and to be available, in any way possible, in service of the mission.

The Vow of Association expresses the ministry of the Brother, which is not identified with the function or work that the person accomplishes during part of his life, but rather is the sum total of the Brother’s identity as service to the Church. This ministry is a communal one.

III

Structures of Communion and Animation

Animation, Accompaniment

1. Leadership and Animation.

The meaning of leadership and of animation that the Rule of the Brothers applies to the role of authority in the Institute can be used as well in Lasallian association: *“The Brothers consider the exercise of authority as a way of serving the community. Authority has for its purpose to promote communion among all the Brothers, the vitality of the Institute, the efficacy of its mission and interdependence among the various units that compose it. Authority is exercised with a sensitivity to persons and with respect for subsidiarity.”* (Rule, 102)

The functions of leadership and animation of the different Lasallian institutions are put into play in the interior of each institution. There is not a supreme juridical authority in the whole body of the Lasallian family. How can we then ensure that something so vital as the continuance of the original dynamism of the foundational charism be respected? And that this remains as common to all the Lasallian institutions? Besides, how can we be sure that the best coordinated services be focused on the needs that the Lasallian educational mission presents? Only through the *communion* that should exist between those institutions.

In order to specify and deepen that communion the necessary structures must be created, and these at two levels: that of the universal Association, which is the work of the chief officers of the institutions, and of the local communities which can be linked together into a communion of Lasallian communities. For the present time, the proper framework for that appears to be the District. It also seems reasonable that the representatives of the Institute of the Brothers be seen as the principal promoters and guarantors of that communion—the Brother Superior General for the worldwide Institute and the Brother Visitor within the framework of the District.

In the new District that is taking shape in accord with the diverse types of Lasallian associates, the Visitor maintains his role as religious authority (“Major Superior” in canonical language) with regard to the Brothers, and he continues to be for them the immediate point of reference for the mission (the “obedience” comes from him, both for the specific work assignment as for the designation of a community). In like form, he con-

tinues being the “*guarantor of unity*” (Rule, 132) among the Brothers. These functions of the Visitor are not applicable in the same way for the rest of the associates who compose the new Lasallian District. Clearly he does have an animating role for the totality of the District but it must be shared, according to the situation, with the leaders and animators of the remaining Lasallian groups that make up part of the District.

2. Accompaniment.

Accompaniment is the systematic assistance given to persons or to groups for the purpose of facilitating their process of growth in the Lasallian identity. It is a duty that corresponds to mature Lasallian communities to furnish this accompaniment, within their possibilities, for the persons and groups that wish to assume the Lasallian identity.

The **one who accompanies** (mentor) is the person expert in the Lasallian charism, in the mission and in the spirituality, who closely and permanently walks with the person and groups that he accompanies in their process and guides them in their discernment. He may or may not be an actual member of the group accompanied and he may have the same identity (Brother, Sister, Layman or woman, priest) as the one/s accompanied, or it may be different.

Assemblies and Councils

1. General Chapter and District Chapter.

- *The General Chapter*: “Constituted as an image of the whole Institute, the General Chapter is, since the days of the Founder, the ultimate expression of the communion that exists among all the Brothers. It perpetuates among them the living fidelity to the special charism of the Institute.

Being responsible for the entire Body of the Institute, the Chapter is qualified to undertake in its name a periodical evaluation of the life of the Institute, to provide for its continuing adaptation and renewal, and to set out the main guidelines for future action. In addition, the Chapter elects the Brother Superior and the Brothers Councillors. It has the power to take all suitable legislative and administrative measures that concern the establishments and the members of the Institute.” (Rule, 103)

- *The District Chapter*: “As an assembly of a pastoral and administrative nature, the District Chapter manifests the profound unity existing among the Brothers and permits their active participation, either directly or through their delegates, in the structures of reflection and decision in the District. ... It evaluates the life of the District in all its aspects. It takes into account the local situation and it establishes a schedule of precise programmes for renewal, adaptation or growth to be implemented in the near future.” (Rule, 128)

*** General and District Chapters are typical structures of a religious institution. For the time of transition in which we find ourselves for several years now, the participation of other Lasallians, distinct from the Brothers, has been allowed but always in their condition as invitees. Nevertheless, if the new Lasallian associates are to feel fully responsible for the charism and the mission, new structures of communion and animation are called for, such as the Assemblies of Associates for the MEL (Lasallian Educational Mission), where all may take part with equality of rights.

2. Assembly of associates for the Lasallian Educational Mission.

The 43rd General Chapter proposed this International Assembly as a place of encounter between Brothers and the rest of the Lasallian associates, in order to develop the following objectives (propositions 3 and 8):

- Share the experiences of association, evaluate the process and present action plans for the next General Chapter for the purpose of developing association.
- Formulate and propose responses to the new necessities of the mission for the educational service to the poor.

The Assembly has also been established both at the regional and even the district levels. All the participants attend with equality of voice and vote.

The Assembly (at worldwide, regional and district levels) represents a charismatic family, not a juridical institution (as is a General Chapter or a district chapter of the Brothers), and so its authority cannot be, in any case, juridical or prescriptive. Its authority lies in its ability to illuminate and signal the paths to follow for the Lasallian Family at their respective levels. The discernment that it provides must then be put into practice by the decision making organisms that represent the various Lasallian groups and institutions.

This characteristic of the Assembly as a place of encounter, communion and discernment, not of governance, should be taken into account when it is being organized so that it is not squeezed into the usual schemes that have typified the chapters of religious institutes.

3. District Councils.

- *The District Council of the Brothers*: “The mission of the District Council is to promote the unity of the District and to assist the Brother Visitor in the exercise of his duties. Together they make plans for the progress of the District and they study how to face the problems that arise.” (Rule, 136)

In the measure to which the new structures of Lasallian Association are being molded, the District Council of the Brothers, as a canonical entity for the support of the Major Superior, must of necessity be separated from that of the Associates but also sharing with it some of its attributions, so that the former reserves to itself only those that correspond to its function of representation of the Brothers as well as acting in concert with the other structures of district animation.

- *The District Council for the Mission*: The 43rd General Chapter proposed to the Districts (propositions 5 and 6) that a structure be created for the Lasallian educational mission in each district, composed of Brothers and Associates, in which all may participate with voice and vote. The most common name by which this structure has come to be known is that of “Council for the Mission”.

The District Council for the Mission, where the various groups of Associates and Collaborators that make up the District are represented, can now assume functions of discernment that previously belonged to the District Council of the Brothers, in what referred to the educational mission.

Community

1. The ambiguity of the term.

“Community” is a very ambiguous term, used in very diverse contexts: the political, geographic, religious, in the business world... to express very different realities, but with a common denominator: the grouping of persons.

We are referring here to *community* in the context of Lasallian Association.

2. In service of communion for mission.

The *community* is a structure that allows one to do or to make real *communion for mission* and to do it in a way that is part of a whole. Basically, there may be differences in work teams, or reflections groups, or prayer groups...even though the community may gather together all these aspects.

The link that unites *communion* with *mission* is *charism*, which in the end is the Spirit present in the persons who make up the community. Lasallian charism develops a dynamic in the community of listening, dialoguing about, and responding to those requests that come from the mission. The charism develops a solidarity among persons and a unity of hearts, at the same time as it goes along discovering the profound meaning of what is being lived.

3. Lasallian community

Lasallian community is the practical result of this dynamic of *communion and mission* in light of the *Lasallian charism*. In this dialogue, diverse, personal or vocational charisms enter into play, as well as states of life, options...and as a result there are diverse *Lasallian communities*: religious communities of Brothers, Sisters, communities of lay persons, communities of religious and lay persons...therefore, the term Lasallian community designates very different realities or structures, different in terms of their meeting schedules, mutual dependence, sharing of goods...

The relationship and the dependence of some Lasallian communities with others gives rise to another level of communion that makes the District a *community of communities*. On a broader level, we can refer to the *world Lasallian community*, always understood as a *communion of communities*, or the Lasallian Family.

Among the local Lasallian community we can specify and differentiate:

3.1 The Educational Communities of the Lasallian schools, formed by educators (not exclusively the teachers) who have a role in the education of the beneficiaries of the school. In the broad sense, the term “educational community” also includes the beneficiaries, whether these be children, youngsters or adults.

What converts a regular educational community into a Lasallian community is the existence in its interior of the dynamisms of association that are characteristics of the Lasallian charism, especially:

- a way of living in solidarity and brotherhood, fostered by the members of the educational community;
- the community practice of listening to the calls of the children and youth, especially of poor youth; and for that reason, an on-going effort to organize the educational effort for the service of concrete persons among the students, for their needs, especially for those who require more attention;
- An active participation in the responsibility for the mission;
- The quest together for the deepest sense of the work or education in the light of Lasallian spirituality.

Naturally, the presence of these dynamisms will depend in great part if, at the heart of the educational community, a community of faith exists which intentionally lives the Lasallian charism and acts as a leaven in the community at large.

3.2 Christian communities: the members of these communities are united by explicit bonds of the Christian faith and by the intention, also expressed, of developing bonds of communion among themselves and serving the educational mission through that communion, guided by the Lasallian charism.

Their community structure takes on various forms; in some cases it may be the moments of encounter either in a weekly or a bi-weekly meeting while reserving more intense moments or longer periods of sharing for scheduled times of the year. There are also cases of Christian and Lasallian communities living in common under the same roof, with a daily rhythm of community prayer and a high level of communication and the sharing of goods, all of which is motivated by the Lasallian mission of education.

3.3 Communities of faith of the various confessions, formed with the adherents of different religions. It is the mission that unites them, the desire to give a response to the needs of the poor, and that finds them laboring together in the Work of God. Many elements of Lasallian spirituality help them to find meaning to what they are living, even though each one may

add the perspective of his or her own faith. For all of them John Baptist de La Salle is a teacher of life and spirituality.

4. Some reservations.

The use of the term “*community*” to designate the communion of lay persons is accepted with reticence in some places, because traditionally the use of that terms refers to a *religious community* or because it is understood as meaning “*life in common*” under the same roof. In other places, the reticence is due to the idea that it seems to refer to a reality that is very demanding, and for that reason some prefer to use the term “*group*.”

The District

1. The District as the organizational unit of the Institute of the Brothers (FSC).

In the Lasallian context, the term “district” designated, originally, the basic unit for the territorial organization of the Institute of the Brothers. It grouped together a certain number of Brothers under obedience to a Brother Visitor. It is the equivalent of the term “province” that is commonly used in the majority of religious congregations and, occasionally, in some Lasallian districts as well. The District “manifests and fosters the fraternal union which enables all, communities and Brothers alike, to assist each other in sharing their common responsibility for their life and their apostolic work” (Rule, 124)

In the present-day situation when the Lasallian charism is flourishing in the Church-communion, the district is becoming the place where the new forms of Lasallian life are recognized, the “*frame of reference*”, as the General Chapter of 2000 called it, the place where the structures of the new Lasallian reality of association are taking shape.

2. Toward a new concept of District.

In this new context, and in the measure to which this new reality of association is developing, a new concept of the Lasallian district is evolving as the organizational structure that stimulates the communion of the Lasallian Family for the service of the Lasallian mission of education. For these reasons we can speak of the new District:

- It guarantees that formation in the Lasallian charism reaches all its members.
- It promotes human relationships, and, based on them, communion among the Lasallian communities and among the members of these communities.
- It sees to it that all those in charge of providing guidelines for Lasallian educational works are aware that educational service of the poor is a fundamental priority (Circular 447, page 11).
- Where there exist diverse Lasallian institutions, the District community promotes a coordinated response to the needs of the mission, both in its discernment of current works as well as in beginning new works.
- It promotes solidarity in the shared search and choice of responses to the needs of the mission, co-responsibility in preparation of programs, and subsidiarity in action among all those who share the mission.
- It develops a style of funding and administering the financial resources, taking into account decreasing dependence upon contributions coming from structures of the Brothers, and it encourages shared responsibility of all those associated in the financial support of Association.
- Based on the above points, a sense of belonging should be instilled among its members: to the District, to the living Lasallian story, to the overall group of Lasallian associates.

The District takes the community as the basis of its organization, not the educational establishment and it sees itself as an overarching community of Lasallian communities. In this sense it is no different from the traditional district. The real difference is that now the communities have become much more diversified in the composition of its members and, as a consequence, also in the rhythm and style of community life.

*** What is said here of the District is valid fully or in great measure for the Region (Rule, 127), as a coming together of Districts with similar geographical or cultural affinity. This applies as well for territorial organizations connected to the District, such as the Subdistrict (Rule, 125 c) and the Delegation (Rule, 126).

Lasallian Family

1. An inclusive concept:

“The expression *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” (42nd General Chapter, Circular 415, page 49, proposition 3).

This clarification or definition provided by the 42nd General Chapter (1993) makes the Lasallian Family a very *inclusive* concept, since it includes all those who, in one form or another, on superficial or profound levels, participate in the *Lasallian educational enterprise* (also a very broad concept which is not limited to works or centers that belong to the Institute of the Brothers). At the same time, this means that there are different grades or levels of belonging, as happens in any family. But it is not a static or invariable type of belonging, but one that depends on a *process* in which one can make more or less progress. The process of belonging to the Lasallian Family comes about as *one shares the spirit and the mission of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*.

“*Lasallian Family*” is not the same, therefore, as a “group of Lasallian associates”, but this group forms part of the Lasallian Family and constitutes its central or essential nucleus, a guarantee that constantly reminds the entire Family of the spirit which ought to animate it and the mission for which it exists.

2. Development of the concept:

The concept “Lasallian Family” has appeared in Institute documents since the General Chapter of 1976 (Circular 403, page 78, number 6), but the term has not been accepted everywhere. It can be said that, since the year 2000, it is now commonly used in the Lasallian world to include under the same “umbrella” *“all people, groups, and movements who find their inspiration in the educational approach and spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.”* (cf. Glossary of Terms, at the end of the General Council’s Circular entitled *“The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education. A Shared Mission”*, 1997).

At present, a gradual change of mentality is occurring, especially among the Brothers, as well as among other Lasallians, in regard to the way the

Lasallian Family is considered vis-a-vis the Institute of the Brothers. Instead of thinking about the Lasallian Family in relation to the Institute of the Brothers, it is now thought of in relation to the Lasallian educational mission. The Institute itself is no longer considered the center but rather is seen as one planet in the Lasallian planetary system, together with other planets which circle in distinct orbits around the Lasallian educational mission, the true “Sun” of our system. In this change of center, the Institute of the Brothers, because of its organizational ability and as the primary guarantor of the Lasallian charism, has to take the initiative in advancing new structures, such as the International Assembly of “Associates for the Lasallian Educational Mission”, where communion and the sharing of leadership roles among the whole Lasallian Family becomes effective.

The F.S.C.’ Institut

“The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is the first form of association desired by St. John Baptist de La Salle” (43rd General Chapter, Circular 447, page 3).

From the point of view of Canon Law, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (FSC)⁴ is included among the forms of consecrated life in the Church as a *religious institute*⁵: “The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools has been approved by Pope Benedict XIII in the Bull *“In apostolicae dignitatis solio”*. It is an Institute of pontifical right, composed exclusively of lay religious men” (Regla, 2).

The use of the term *Institute* (“Lasallian Institute”, “Institute of the Brothers...”) is not always exact. Normally it refers to the religious institution formed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the works that depend directly on it. However it is frequently employed as the equivalent of the Lasallian World, or of the Lasallian Family; for example, when people would say that “The Institute is celebrating the 1st International Assembly of the Lasallian Educational Mission”. In reality, it is not the

⁴ The acronym “F.S.C.” corresponds to the initials of the Latin words (genitive case) *“Fratrum Scholarum Christianarum”*: of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

⁵ *“A religious institute is a society in which the members, according to their own right, emit public vows, perpetual or temporary which must nevertheless be renewed at the end of the term stipulated, and live the fraternal life in common”* (Code of Canon Law, c. 607,2).

Institute but the ensemble of the Lasallian Associates, or the worldwide Lasallian Community, in these expressions, in which the Institute of the Brothers is included.

It is even more confusing to state that “the Institute has opened its doors to lay persons”, or that “Lay associates belong to the Institute”. These affirmations make the Institute of the Brothers the equivalent of the whole assembly of Lasallian associates, which is not really the case. The new Lasallian Association that is coming into being in the Church-Communion does not imply that the Institute is expanding with the entrance into it of lay associates, but that the Institute proper must be integrated into a broader reality that is the new body of Lasallian associates, religious men and women, lay persons and priests.

Suggestions for group work with Thematic Vocabulary

1. Understanding the concept.

Have a dialogue based on the following questions:

- How is this term usually understood in our own situation?
- What differences do I find in my way (our way) of understanding the concept and what is stated in the Vocabulary?
- What clarifications seem to me to be the most important?
- What aspects seem unclear to me? How can they be clarified and what other texts might help us in this clarification?

2. The relationship between concepts: a conceptual map.

Starting from the concept that is the object of our discussion, we create a “conceptual map,” establishing relationships with other concepts from the Thematic Vocabulary (see, for example, the conceptual map which was set up based on the concept of “charism,” on pages 7 - 9 of “The Lasallian Charism,” *Lasallian Studies* n. 13).

3. A “spiraling” in-depth look.

Develop the reflection starting from the concepts that are most essential and referenced more often, and group the other concepts around the first ones. Each essential concept with its “satellites” allows for a global view of Association. That global view is looked at in greater detail with each perspective given by a new essential concept and its “satellites.”

Suggested essential concepts:

Association (1st part, 2)

Mission and Communion (1st part, 3)

Charism

Spirituality

The Founder

Ministry

(Others may be added: Identity, Educational Service of the Poor...)

The choice of “satellites” may vary according to the concerns or questions of the given moment, and they can be added to in the various sections of other themes. The Index will come in handy here. For example, with regard to the concept of the FOUNDER, the following “satellites” may be included:

The charism of the founder and the foundational charism (section 2 of “Lasallian Charism”),

The Spirit of Faith (section 2 of “The Spirit of Faith”),

The Spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle (section 5 of “Lasallian Spirituality”),

The Founding Story,

Lasallian (person),

Lasallian Ministry (section 4 of “Ministry”),

The meaning of the Vow of Association in the foundational stage (section 1 of the “Vow of Association”).

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