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**Bases for an actual model  
of the Lasallian Family**

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## 1<sup>st</sup> Part

### **Charismatic Families and Church-Communion**

The Lasallian Family forms part of a very extensive ecclesial event which sheds light on and brings out the meaning of that family: it is the phenomenon of evangelical or charismatic families which are developing in the Church today, arising from the charisms which are very old but also of charisms which have made their appearance recently. It is like a current that is bringing new life to the Church and which owes its strength to the new ecclesiology of communion inspired in Vatican Council II.

In order to understand the meaning and the reach of the Lasallian Family and to solidly contribute to its building up it is necessary to situate it, firstly, in the interior of this ecclesial current that we will present in chapters 1 and 2.





# I. The new Charismatic Families: A fruit of Church-Communion

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## 1. A TIME OF COMMUNION

People began to affirm “*it is time for the lay people*” in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council and continued to repeat it frequently after the Council. This was based on the foundations established by the Council itself so that lay people could take an active role in the Church and in evangelization. John Paul II joyfully observed this reality, at the beginning of his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990): “*The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is changing ecclesial life*” (RM 2).

The “time of the laity” has reminded us of the common ground from which we all come, the common soil of our roots: we are all born to faith and we enter the church as “laity” (members of the Christian people). Within this common framework, we are called to exercise certain functions in service of the ecclesial community, to live certain characteristics that belong to the common patrimony in a significant or prophetic way, and to serve the common mission from within our charisms and concrete ministries. The “lay” dimension of “belonging to the people” is always with us: some are living it in a meaningful way, (the “lay” Christians); others, those called to priestly or hierarchical ministry, and those called to consecrated life, must live this dimension as a constant reference that reminds them for whom and in favor of whom they exercise their ministry and are signs of consecration, respectively.

But, might this burgeoning of the active laity in the Church not have a dark side, the decline of religious life? Many voices, inside and outside religious congregations, have echoed this suspicion that unites the consequence of both phenomena: the era of religious life is winding down; it is the time of the laity. The dry-spell in vocations that many congregations experience, especially in developed countries, seem to confirm these fears. If such is the case, the relationship between religious and laity simply becomes a matter of “transferal of competence” from the former to the latter.

Nevertheless, there are many signs that contradict this over-simplification and invite us to judge this era we are living in the Church as a “*time of*

*communion*,” at least in those things that refer to the relationships between laity and religious life. Some of the most precious fruits of this communion are the so-called *charismatic or gospel families*. The process these relationships have followed has overcome many of the ambiguities and vacillations that we encounter especially at the beginning, and finally end up becoming a model of response to the challenge that John Paul II made to Christians at the beginning of the third millennium: “*To make the Church the home and the school of communion*” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43).

This is the soil and the framework in which the relationship between laity-religious is growing over the last decades, and in which the new *charismatic or evangelical families* are taking root. And these are the basic principles of Church-Communion:

- reference to the Sacraments of Initiation as the source and foundation of all Christian life;
- the common call to holiness;
- common and unique dignity;
- the sole ecclesial mission, shared by all;
- the common right and duty to participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

## 2. A CHANGE OF HISTORICAL CYCLE: A NEW ECCLESIAL “ECOSYSTEM”

### 2.1 Between pyramid and communion.

The soil and the common framework that we just discussed were clearly present in the great documents of Vatican II and later pontifical documents; but they were not so clear in the minds and hearts of the vast majority of those who were going to be the protagonists of the process of communion, religious and laity. They were even less aware that there had been a great shift in historical cycle that was going to substantially affect the inner life of the church, and more concretely, the way of living consecrated life in the church.

In the beginning the language used was far from that of a “common soil,” rather the religious institutes considered themselves to be at the center as the “sources” that they generously opened for the laity, who came to them

to slake their thirst. We hear expressions like “participating in the institute’s mission,” and “the charism of the institute”..

We needed to make a qualitative leap from one way of thinking about and considering ourselves as a pyramidal church, to a way of thinking and considering it in terms of communion. And the leap was only possible after going through a process of conversion. Because what was at stake was not a change of theoretical schema or vocabulary, or replacing one set of structures with another. We were dealing with an authentic Exodus: abandoning one ecclesial ecosystem suffering from sclerosis, made up of forms of Christian life that were perfectly classified and separate, in order to enter into a new ecclesial ecosystem whose definitive name is “communion”. In this new system there are no more exclusive demarcation lines, only areas that are significantly emphasized in benefit of all. In this “communion” ecosystem the starting point is a series of common sources, a common mission, a common spirit, to recognize later diversity, the various forms of participation in what is common. The starting point is unity; differentiation of complementary ways of living that unity comes later.

The change from one ecosystem to another only happens when we learn a different way to breath, nourish ourselves, relate with others... a way that has little to do with the previous ecosystem. In this process of “acclimatizing,” one factor marks the difference between some institutes and others, even within the same institute, between some provinces and others. It is whether or not they think of the new situation “alone” (religious separated from the laity) or they think about it together, and decide together what strategies to follow. The same can be said of the formation offered to the laity about the charism, separate from the religious, or a formation where lay and religious share their experience. Clearly, the journey toward communion is more secure and happens best when it is done in communion.

The process of relationship between religious and laity is triggered when the latter seek out the former with the desire to participate in the charism that we traditionally attribute to religious institutes. The relationship between the two groups is not new; it has existed for a long time and in some cases is institutionalized, as is the case of the “third orders.” The newness resides first in that now we are not talking about participating in some aspects of the spirituality of the religious institutes or in some an-

cillary tasks, but in the same mission the religious carry out and with the same charisms. In second place, we are not necessarily talking about a relationship of dependency (the laity under the control of the religious), but rather of communion, of being side by side complementing each other reciprocally.

What is more, the ecclesiology of communion that simultaneously developed, legitimated this participation by reminding all not only of the unity of the ecclesial mission, but also that these charisms belong to the church and the possibility of being participated in by persons distinct, in principle, from those to whom it was granted (Cfr. *Christifideles Laici*, 24,3).

## **2.2 Religious faced with the advances of the laity.**

Religious have interpreted in several different ways the arrival of the “new-comers” to the mission formerly considered the domain of “the religious”:

For some this supposed expansion of the charism is no more than a strategy on the part of the institutes themselves and provinces of religious who have few vocations. They use the laity to fill in the gaps in the corresponding apostolic works. According to this perspective, where there is no shortage to religious vocations, this “ingestion” of the laity into the charism and mission “proper” to religious need not be encouraged.

Other, in a more positive light, see this participation as a beneficial situation for the laity and, for that very reason, feel it is appropriate to encourage and accompany it. But they continue to see it as an external phenomenon that ought not to affect the life and organization of the religious. It suffices for the superiors of these institutes to name some members to accompany these groups of lay persons, while the religious communities continue their life untouched by these relationships.

And finally, others perceive it as a sign from the Holy Spirit that points to a profound change in the internal ecclesial relationships. They see this as a direct call to the religious to situate themselves in another way within the church, to enter into an authentic communion with other Christians in the new ecclesial ecosystem. The comparison of the previous situation with the new is inevitable, and sentiments may vary, above all when we note the diminishment in the number of religious. But if we take the long view, this last perspective leads us to evaluate the new ecosystem as a raising-of-the-bar in terms of ecclesial maturity.

### 2.3 The Exodus of the religious: from cloister to communion.

We now note the most characteristic moments in the relational process between laity and religious, that is, the conversion of one group to another in order to enter into the ecosystem of “communion”.

When religious begin their journey, they are coming from a space (real or symbolic) called “cloister,” that is: separation from “those who not like we are,” separation “from the world” and from those Christians, who, because they are secular, belong to the world. The mutual relationships that exist at this time are based on the principal that each group carries out its baptismal life in radically different ways and in separate places. Lay Christians are seen as the recipients of the mission of the religious, not as companions in that mission. The religious help them spiritually, but from above with the benevolent gaze of the wise who teach the ignorant.

In successive steps the religious will discover the laity as “collaborators” in the mission. Later they will recognize that they are called to share their experience of being “experts in communion,” “spiritual guides”... That is to say, they discover themselves as signs for other Christians. They have taken giant steps from cloister toward communion, from “being far *from them*” to “being *for you*.” The next and definitive step toward this new ecosystem can be expressed this way: “we are *with you* in the same mission, and together we give witness of Christian faith to society”.

The most graphic examples of this process are those cases in which religious and laity collaborate in social works, for examples schools that originally belonged to the religious institutes. The process has received a name: sharing the mission, or “shared mission,” but it has different levels of implementation:

- The laity come to this mission simply as substitutes for the religious; they are employees on contract for concrete jobs. The religious consider them as outsiders to the mission, collaborators in the work but not as possible bearers of the charism that opens into mission.
- In the second stage, the laity is entrusted with roles of responsibility in the guidance of the works, but only under strict supervision by the religious, who are the “bearers” of the charism.
- In the next stage they are now considered bearers of the Spirit that comes from the religious institutes to continue their social works,

but there is a clear hierarchical criterion: the key positions in the administrative councils must be filled by religious, who are the only guarantors of the charism.

- The definite step comes when the laity are also considered as participants and protagonists in the mission to the fullest extent, and therefore, they are also bearers of the charism. Then we can begin to talk about being “associated” in the charism for the mission.

## 2.4 The Exodus of the laity: from the crumbs to the banquet.

The process of integration of the laity into the new ecosystem together with the religious will be every bit as laborious. We might represent it in the following image: from being content with the crumbs from the table, to participating in the banquet.

This phenomenon of association is intimately linked with that of new lay movement. John Paul II affirmed that we are in “*a new era of group endeavors of the lay faithful*” (*Christifideles Laici* 29). Lay Christian no longer come to the religious seeking crumbs from the spirituality of religious institutes, but rather for “*responsible participation of all of them in the Church’s mission of carrying forth the Gospel of Christ – the source of hope for humanity and the renewal of society*” (ChL 29).

Those who have entered the process through the spirituality of an Institute, such as “third orders,” have had to discover the undeniable aspect of mission that gives meaning to the spirituality and, if absent, leaves the spirituality with no meaning. Once they have discovered themselves as protagonists in the mission formerly attributed to the religious, they also discover that spirituality as their own, with its lay accents, not as a copy or a mere participation in the spirituality of the religious.

Those who entered the process through collaboration in specific tasks have had to discover the profound meaning of these tasks, that is, the spirituality that integrates them into the mission. First, they feel like collaborators with the religious; next, they feel like participants in the mission of the religious (the mission “of the Institute”); finally, they feel that the mission is theirs, *our mission*, because it is the mission of the Church, and they carry it out with the same integrity as the religious, together, in service of the Kingdom.

To a great extent, the rhythm and quality of these processes has depended on certain factors driven by the institutes themselves, especially in the early stages:

- Above all a close relationship among religious and laity, person to person and in a community that welcomes others and shares its experience of life. And in this fraternal atmosphere, shared reflection on the development of the processes.
- A formation adapted to the diverse levels that begins in the experience of the recipients, the gospel journey of the founders and the new ecclesiology of communion.
- Participation in experiences of communion (of laity among themselves, of laity with religious) and in the responsibilities of the mission.

Thanks to these formative elements, the laity feel that they are integrated into the same story that the religious were narrating alone before, and that continues to be animated by the same charism, even though it is a new chapter.

## **2.5 Arrival of the “associates”.**

This is the ambit of the “associates”. It is the term the many religious institutes use to designate those lay people who have established some strong links with the institute, in terms of participation in the respective charism. The term continues to be imprecise and varies from one institute to another, but also from one province to another within the same institute:

- As far as terminology of the subjects goes, some speak of lay people associated with the religious, but also of a mutual association between laity and religious, and lay people who associate among themselves.
- In terms of the object or motive of the association, the various documents speak of “associates in the spirituality of the institute,” associates “to continue the story and spirit of the institute,” associates “in the charism,” associates “for the mission”, etc.
- As for the bonds established in that association, it may range from a diffuse sort of relationship, or the attitude of communion that is maintained from one day to the next but without institutional

signs, all the way to formal contracts, with rites that are similar or parallel to the rituals of religious consecration.

- In terms of the commitment attributed to the associate, this varies from submission to the superiors of the religious institutes, to benevolent collaboration in the works of the institute, up to the point of co-responsible action along with the religious in everything that refers to the inspiration of the charism for the mission.

But within this ambiguity, it is interesting to observe that, to the extent that the processes of participation in the charism advance, and the links of relationship mature among religious and laity, the language used in the documents is centered less on the respective institute and makes more and more references to the communion of lay and religious in the common charism (not the charism “of the institute”), on a basic footing of equality.

### 3. NEW CHARISMATIC FAMILIES: CHANGE OF PLANETARY MODEL

The new style of relationships between laity and religious is giving way to another type of groups different from those that appeared in the previous period. We can characterize the new ecclesial ecosystem under the general heading of charismatic or evangelical families, that is, ensembles made up of institutions and groups of believers united by the same foundational charism, or the same “charismatic root,” embracing different states of life and with different emphases of the same charism. The strength of the charismatic family does not come from the dominant institution that pulls the others along in its wake, but of the communion between the various institution and groups, all serving the same mission that is enriched by the particular charisms of each group.

#### 3.1 Religious institute: geo-centric or helio-centric?

Lay Christians discover the soul of the mission and the origin of spirituality for living the mission in contact with the religious, that is to say, the institutional or foundational charism considered to be the patrimony of the congregation that Church-Communion has now reclaimed as its own.

Lay Christians are more comfortable with these foundational charisms no longer seen as something borrowed, but now as their own, allowing



them to live a life program different from which characterized the religious life.

Of course, the religious institutes have had to undergo a conversion, which we can briefly represent in three major stages:

**1<sup>st</sup> The starting point is a minimalist conception**, characteristic of the pre-conciliar period, when religious life was considered as a “state of perfection.” The predominant characteristic of the time is that lay Christians are not capable of receiving the full potential of the charism embodied in the religious institutes. They could only access minor aspects, “accommodated” to their situation as lay people. Thus the lay Christians interested in living their Christian life with the spirit proper to an institute (no one spoke of “charism” at that time), often assumed a kind of diluted form of religious life in a “third order.” They received small doses of spirituality, or, more accurately, of piety, as lived in the corresponding institute and their participation was reduced to minor aspects, always under the supervision of the religious.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Religious life interpreted the vindication of the universal vocation** to holiness and the participation of all the faithful in the mission of the church by Vatican Council II in two ways. The first is “geo-centric”: the institutes see themselves at the center, but are open to Christians who desire draw near and to participate in “their” charism and in “their” mission. We speak about “degrees of belonging” to the institute... The lay people associate themselves to the institute; they enter into a dependent relationship with the superiors of the institute who, logically, are responsible for accepting or rejecting any requests for association.

We might represent this situation as a planetary system in which there is only one planet (the religious institute in question) with satellites (groups of lay associates) that are in orbit around the sun (the specific mission entrusted to the institute). The charism is something like the force of gravity that draws us to the mission and keeps us moving around it, responding in the appropriate way.

In this mono-planetary model, there is only one way of responding to the mission. There is only one orbit or way of living the charism and, therefore, whoever wants to enter into the “system” corresponding to this charism must become part of the planet or situate himself in orbit around it, assuming the role of satellite.

**3<sup>rd</sup> The progressive incorporation into the ecclesiology of communion** pushes the religious institutes toward a more “helio-centric” position by returning the charisms and mission to the heart of the church. The conviction grows around the criterion that the laity can live the foundational charism of the institute from within other forms of life than those typical of religious life. Not only that, but they can also live it in an integral manner, in relation to the different facets of the person, not the full potential of the charism the fullness of which is beyond any group.

It is up to the institute, especially in the early stages, to help and accompany the new associates to enter into the charism and deepen it. But there is also respect for the initiative these associates might take in seeking out new community and mission structures.

Following the model of the “planetary system,” it is no longer one but various planets in orbit around the same sun. This is the model that corresponds to the new charismatic families. The foundation charism calls forth diverse autonomous “orbits,” even though these are harmonious and complementary. Each orbit symbolizes one way of sharing the identity proper to a charismatic family in the Church. It is a specific vocation that bears a global interpretation of the foundational charism, with the corresponding incidences in the way of living and serving the mission, but also in the style of community life, in spirituality and in general, in the development of the Christian life.

### **3.2 The charism, source of identity and place of encounter.**

In this new ecclesial dynamic the foundational charisms progressively assume new importance, as proof of the protagonism that the Holy Spirit deploys in the new ecclesial ecosystem. In the end, these charisms are gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to the Church, and they resist being enclosed behind the institutional barriers of the orders and congregations. Today they are available to any type of believer.

The foundational charisms with their unavoidable reference to the persons of the founders/foundresses and to their spiritual journeys are a new force field within which the members of a charismatic family weave their relationships with each other: religious, laity, priests, and other groups that make up the family. The charism is also like the blood of the family, or said another way, the spirit that gives life to the family and to its mem-

bers. It is the unifying element, the bridge that enable encounter to take place, the root of mutual relationships, the link that unites and diversifies identities.

We must, however, first recover its roots and originality. The majority of cases we need some type of recovery, since the charisms are often confused with institutional programs that have molded them in parallel with program of consecrated life that embodied their original form.

The laity who unite with a charismatic family do so not only to participate in the mission or spirituality of the institute that is the origin of that family, but also to participate in the foundational charism of that family which they discover as a particular way of living the Christian identity common to all believers. More specifically, the recovery of the foundational charism must begin in baptismal identity, since it is a gift for living this identity, for incarnating the gospel with a global perspective that is characterized by a way of serving the Kingdom of God, and brings with it as a way of belonging to Christ and to the Church. They must rediscover the foundational charism in the light of the gospel journey of the founder, but also in the reflection and dialogue among the various groups that live out the charism, lay and religious. This confrontation prevents the charism from being confused with the projects in which it is concretely embodied.

Creative fidelity, necessary for maintaining and continuing the aforementioned charism in the Church, no longer depends only on the institute that represented it up to this time, but on the diverse groups that make up the charismatic family and on those who are associated within it. All of these people continue the narrative that has its origin in the gospel journey of the founders, and today continues with new chapters in the Church-Communion.

And even though it is not possible here to go into great depth on this topic, we must at least note that flowering of these foundational charisms is not limited to the confines of the institutional church, but overflow its borders and expands, not only among Christians of confessions different from Catholicism, but also to believers of others non-Christian religions. These are people who feel called to participate in the mission of salvation, side by side with Christians (lay and religious), as transmitters of God's love and mercy. The Founder becomes for them a master and guide that

uncovers for them the depth of the human tasks they carry out. This phenomenon is not an oddity when seen from the perspective of Christian theology, and was made manifest in Vatican II where we read about the “seeds of the Word” (*Ad Gentes* 11.2; 15.1) present in all cultures. The universal action of the Holy Spirit, who *blows where it will*, is not bound by the borders of the institutional Church. This extra-ecclesial openness of the charism and its implications for the composition of these charismatic families with associates from other religions is beginning to develop as a real possibility for part of some institutes.

### 3.3 The charismatic family, the gospel visage and icon of the church.

To the extent that the foundational charism has developed as the central place of reference for the relationships between religious and laity within the charismatic family, to that same extent, the division between laity and religious based on the difference of states of life has diminished and the communion of communities for the mission has gained ground. These are communities with the same charism but with different existential or vocational programs.

The charism, as the perspective from which we contemplate the gospel, makes the charismatic family a “*gospel family*”<sup>1</sup>: it presents to the Church and to society a face of the gospel that underscores in a harmonious way certain attitudes of Jesus, certain values of the Kingdom, a form of mediating God’s salvation. Within each family, the same face of the gospel becomes tangible in different existential programs in the corresponding ecclesial communities that make up the charismatic-gospel family. Each existential program, with its ecclesial and social dimensions, becomes a channel for the diverse personal charisms and attempts to incarnate the foundational charism in forms of lay or religious life.

The foundational charism, in the light of present ecclesiology that presents the church as “mystery of communion,” is one way to live out communion for the mission. In this sense, each gospel family presents itself to society as an icon of the Church. The more they live in the communion among Christians of diverse identities, lay and consecrated, the better the expression, like a rainbow that expresses unity in diversity. It is commun-

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<sup>1</sup> Here I follow the proposals suggested by Bernadette Delizy in “*Vers de ‘Familles évangéliques’. Le renouveau des relations entre chrétiens et congrégations*”. Les Éditions de l’Atelier. Paris 2004.

ion for the mission, channeled and energized by the charism. Within this dynamism, we see the birth of mixed communities for the mission, with representatives of the different vocations, lay, religious, priestly.

### **3.4 The challenge of the institutes: re-foundation in the foundational charism.**

This integration of old institutes into the new charismatic families is not automatic, even though they are at the origin of these families. In order for this incorporation to be both real and fruitful, and not just nominal, the religious institutes must accept the challenges of recovering, or clarifying their identity in some cases, taking as their reference their foundational charism. This challenge is more pressing in the congregations of apostolic life that developed from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century on.

The Code of Canon Law in effect during almost all the 20<sup>th</sup> Century contributed to a loss of the originality of the foundational charisms. This code promulgated the wide-spread notion among religious that their foundational charism, rather than being a way of being Christian and of living the gospel, was an add-on to their religious state, hardly worth noting. In institutes of apostolic life this became “apostolic activity,” a narrow view of the mission. The lack of a theology of religious life appropriate to these institutes contributed to the weakening of their identity and the corresponding crisis that occurred when lay people entered into the places of apostolic action formerly the domain of the religious and shared their mission. The loss of clear and defined boundaries between the “states of life,” between the places for mission... has revealed the insecurity and lack of foundation of many religious who defined their identity based on what separated or differentiated them, or even in the apostolic activity previously reserved for them.

The challenge has two complementary sides of the coin. The first coincides with the recovery of the charism in terms of baptismal identity. We have already discussed this. This is the discovery that we are first Christians with a particular global perspective of the gospel and a way of serving the Kingdom of God. This is the aspect we share with other baptized people who live the charism expressed in various lifestyle. We must return to all believers the three dimensions of Christian life towards which the charism tends (for a long time hidden in religious life): consecration, mission, and communion. These three dimensions must be proposed in the

light of the foundational charism to the whole charismatic family before any one group or institution within it can assume them in its particular existential program.

The other side of the coin consists in discovering and affirming the charism as the origin and root of consecrated life for the religious in this institution. It is the particular vocation to a community and institutional program for living through which people integrate themselves into religious or consecrated life. Living this program constitutes them as “experts in communion”, and “spiritual guides” at the service of Christian people and above all, makes them signs and prophets of the very charism that unites them to so many other people.

Accepting this challenge (conversion to the charism in the double-faceted way we have just seen) changes the attitude of the religious and of the institutes:

- From a reactive attitude, one of resignation, frustration or defensiveness when faced with the threat of being displaced from the central position in evangelization or seeing their identity absorbed by the laity...
- To a proactive attitude of joyfully valuing their charism and knowing how to make the first step toward assuming the place and function that corresponds to them and, from that place, promoting communion of the whole body or charismatic family in service of a common mission.

The challenge that comes with it means that the religious institutes assume the commitment to be the guarantor of the charism in their respective charismatic families, without being able to lay exclusive claim to it. The religious institute or institutes that received the charism directly through their founders continue to be the original wellspring where one goes to slake one’s thirst for the charism. We must not confuse the well with the water: and the water can seek other outlets to the surface. But the institute will always be responsible for offering its well and a guarantee of the authenticity of the charism, and the members of the charismatic family, not just the religious, can demand an accounting of their responsibility.

### **3.5 New wineskins for new wine.**

There is still pending work to be done. Even though we have begun we

must put in place new structures for communion and animation that allow us to develop the relationships between the laity and religious, as well as that between the diverse groups and institutions that make up the new charismatic families. It is important because it is a means the powerfully conditions the progress and quality of these relationships as well as the acceptance of co-responsibility in creative fidelity to the charism.

In the post-conciliar era that we are analyzing, this relationship began by taking advantage of the structures that already existed in orders and congregations for example, chapters (provincial and general chapters, councils...etc.). Some lay people are nominally invited by the religious to participate in them, but these structures are frequently subjected to canonical regulations that impede the full participation of the laity. That is, they make use of old wineskins or traditional structures of religious life to incorporate new wine, these new relationships between lay and religious. The risks were foreseen in the gospel. This situation is necessarily provisional.

The next step consisted in the setting up of new structures: assemblies, councils, work commissions that gathered religious and lay together in equality of voice and vote. The error that often happened was to apply the schema and method of the previous structures to the new. The success was in the valuing and promoting the capacity to see reality with new eyes, to discern the calls of the charism and the invitations of the Spirit with new sensitivity. To do this, the organization of said structures must facilitate interpersonal encounter, mutual listening, and shared discernment.

The change of vocabulary is significant also, even though the new terminology does not always correspond to new realities. The term "*third order*", that designated the lay people associated with some religious order or congregation has practically fallen into disuse. It was replaced first of all by *secular or lay order*, and later on by *lay communities or fraternities*, or also by *lay movement*. What is more important is that the change of name normally goes along with the change of relationships between the lay persons and the religious, as we have described.

The new terms being used to designate the process indicate, within a certain variety, the coincidence in the principal lines of the evolution. The term *family* is, without doubt, the one most employed to designate the overarching reach of groups, communities and institutions that partici-

pate in the same foundational charism. But the terms *society or fraternity* are also being used with the same meaning and, at times, simultaneously with *family*. In some cases the classic term order is utilized as equivalent to or nearly the same as that of *family*.



## II. Ecclesiology of Communion, the theological basis of the new Charismatic Families

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### 1. THE CHURCH OF VATICAN II, 40 YEARS IN SEARCH OF ITS IDENTITY

In order to comprehend the internal dynamism that has been creating the ecosystem that nourishes the new charismatic or evangelical family it behoves us to allude to the awareness or image that the Church has acquired of itself in this time of the symbolic 40 years following the Council: it has been a regular pilgrimage through which, in the several Synods and all the ecclesial reflection, the Church has been clarifying its identity.

In *Lumen gentium* the Church described the initial nucleus of this identity, rediscovered as the People of God, leaving behind that other description as *Society of Faithful Christians...* The posterior development has become more explicit as “*Communion of Communities*”, where it is the Community that gives origin to the Institution; where relationships come before organization; where basic and fundamental equality among everyone, supersedes the differences arising from positions and ministries; where the common call to holiness comes before vocational specificities...

In this ecclesiology of communion the schema of dichotomy that had previously defined the Church, such as “*hierarchy - laity*” and “*religious — non religious*” have increasingly fallen into disuse, as well as the trinomial “*clergy — religious — laity*”, all those terms that put an emphasis on what is different from what is basically common. And another binomial is being strengthened, one that is more representative of this ecclesiology of communion: “*community - ministries and charisms*”, where unity is anterior and is fundamental to the distinction. We underscore both the common Christian condition and the free and varied initiative of the Spirit, which raises the variety of ministries and charisms for our common utility in the Church. It is a design, which, therefore, values differences, but in a complementary way, which sees them as being, subordinated to unity.

Let us see how this change of mentality has come about:

## 1.1 The two core concepts of 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 the new charismatic families in that light.

*Mission and communion* are the two axes of Christian faith; they allow us to understand, or rather, they introduce us to the identity or the mystery of 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. “*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.

Ten years after Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI, in his document *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, developed a synthesis of the identity of the Church around the concept of evangelization. He presented the Church as a community that strives to be evangelizer and evangelized at the same time:

*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)

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.

- *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. ...*
- *The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. ...*
- *Having been sent and evangelized, the Church herself sends out evangelizers. ...* (EN 15)

## 1.2 The Mystery of Church - Communion.

Thirteen years after *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the document *Christifideles*

*Laici* (1988) articulated for us a synthesis of the identity of the Church with greater depth and clarity.

The “mystery of the Church”, that is to say, its most profound identity, now had a name: *Church - ommunion*, that is identical to the central nucleus of evangelization: “*The reality of the Church as Communion is, then, the integrating aspect, indeed the central content of the “mystery”, or rather, 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 and mission form together the vital ambit which joins the faithful as one and is dependent on all:

*All the members of the People of God – clergy, men and women religious, the lay faithful – are laborers in the vineyard. At one and the same time they all are the goal and subjects of Church communion as well as of participation in the mission of salvation. Every one of us possessing charisms and ministries, diverse yet complementary, works in the one and same vineyard of the Lord.* (ChL 55.1).

In this *ecosystem* of Church-Communion, all and each of the components live in relation to the others, without losing their specificity, which is a richness for the entire body. The text that follows is fundamental as the expression of the new relational dynamism, and it would not have been possible to write it in the ecclesiology that preceded Vatican Council II:

*In Church Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart,*

*while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service.* (Christifideles Laici 55.3)

### 1.3 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."* (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.

- *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)

## 2. COMMUNION FOR THE MISSION.

### 2.1 Collaboration with everyone, in a broad sense of mission.

In this ecclesial consciousness that we have been referring to, we perceive a series of concentric circles which, from the outside in, point out the greatest intensification of mission and communion. The largest circle in-

cludes all of humanity, based on the recognition of the universality of salvation and the presence of the seeds of the Word (Vatican II, *Ad Gentes* 11,2; 15,1) that are found in every culture: “*Since God the Father is the origin and purpose of all men, we are all called to be brothers. Therefore, if we have been summoned to the same destiny, human and divine, we can and we should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace.*” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* 92.5).

It is clear that in the background of this first circle there is a broad concept of salvation brought out by the Council itself, that includes the same amplitude in the communion and consequent collaboration: “*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).

So then, the dependence of mission and communion have here its first practical application, the first framework of understanding in the universalist spirit of *Gaudium et Spes* (cf. pp. 77.90-93): the working together of all men and women of good will to build a more just world, a more fraternal world, one that is in greater solidarity.

## 2.2 Evangelization, a task for all believers.

In the inner circle we arrive at a level which is more explicitly Christian, one that defines the mission as *the work of evangelization*, in the more global sense: a *process* whose ultimate stage is the explicit proclamation and the full adhesion to the Good News of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (cf. EN 17ss). The Church identifies with this work in such a manner that she comes to recognize it as “*her deepest identity*” (EN 14). 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).

The whole Christian People are seen to be the protagonists in the mission and not an elite as religious and priests might have been, nor, as it was affirmed before the Council, the Hierarchy, which used to “delegate” or have others participate...

But not only “The People”, in the corporate sense; each Christian in particular must become a *witness to the light*. Each believer has the re-

sponsibility to be an evangelizer, even if only by the witness of his or her life:

*“The mission affects all Christians” (Redemptoris Missio, 2). “Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. ... All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers.” (EN 21).*

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).*

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).*

And this ecclesial mission, the very same developed in communion, produces communion in such a way that between evangelization and ecclesial community a reciprocal relation of cause-effect is established: “Through evangelization the Church is built up into a *community of faith*...” (ChL 33.4). It is not an indirect consequence. It is precisely its objective: “This re-evangelization... its purpose is the *formation of mature ecclesial communities*...” (ChL 34.9). Now it is no longer the members of a community who feel themselves impelled to evangelize, but whoever acquires the consciousness of being an evangelizer feels that he must be one urged by a community of faith, and the individual must, therefore, become part of a community.

### **2.3 The Laity break into the work of evangelization.**

The leading role of the laity in the life of the Church began in many cases as an ancillary help to the action of men and women religious and priests; then, as the numbers of these decreased, they became almost the embarrassing replacement, seen to be as even “the lesser evil”; little by little they realized that what they were doing was not replacing anyone, but they were simply acting as protagonists in what was proper to them in the Church. What they were missing was what religious and priests always had: *formation*. Formation in order to be aware of what they already carried within themselves; formation to know their possibilities and their

duties as believers; formation to discover their identity and what they could contribute from that identity, complementing the other ecclesial identities.

*“The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one’s vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil one’s mission.”* (ChL 58,1).

And that is the responsibility of those who possess formation and the means to impart it. In the field of Catholic education: *“What is needed is to prepare the lay faithful to dedicate themselves to the work of rearing their children as a true and proper part of Church mission”* (ChL 62.2).

The Council had affirmed the bases: *“The lay apostolate is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself.”* (*Lumen gentium* 33). Then came the Synods like that of 1974, on *Evangelization*, or that of 1987, on *the vocation and the mission of the laity in the Church and in the world*, which developed and clarified the message of the Council: *“The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”* (ChL 33,1)

The reference to the common source is the starting point of a dynamism present in the interior of each Christian, that manifests itself in each one in a different way, always for the common good (cf. 1 Cor 12,7). It is, then, an element both personalizing and creator of community:

*Being “members” of the Church takes nothing away from the fact that each Christian as an individual is “unique and irrepeatable”. On the contrary, this belonging guarantees and fosters the profound sense of that uniqueness and irrepeatability, in so far as these very qualities are the source of variety and richness for the whole Church. Therefore, God calls the individual in Jesus Christ, each one personally by name. In this sense, the Lord’s words “You go into my vineyard too”, directed to the Church as a whole, come specially addressed to each member individually. Because of each member’s unique and irrepeatable character, that is, one’s identity and actions as a person, each individual is placed at the service of the growth of the ecclesial community.* (ChL 28,2)

## 2.4 Unity, even before diversity.

One consequence of the recovery of unity has been an enriching decanting of characteristics that had been considered “exclusive” for one or for others, and which were only *meaningful* for some with regard to the whole.

The result of this transfer has been in many cases spectacular: elements traditionally used to indicate what “distinguished” the Religious from the Secular, like community life and dedication to the apostolate, but also consecration and evangelical radicality, are being taken on, without complications, by groups of seculars when they recognize the demands that are implicit in the Sacraments of Initiation. In another form, of course, but not necessarily “diluted”; after the first trial runs in which frequently the external aspects of the Religious Life were copied - that is, the Religious Life was taken as *model* - they went on to another phase of creativity and originality in which the Religious Life is a sign that suggests, so as to find the modalities needed to live the mission, the community, the reference to God, the evangelical radicality, etc., from what is proper to the Lay Person: based on the condition of being secular and lay.

And these characteristics that were so reserved to the Secular, frequently undervalued and even considered to be “hardly Christian matters”, only “left to them”—it now turns out that they are being taken up again by the Church as traits that are valuable for each and every one of the groups that compose it: *secularity*, that denotes a manner of being in the world and *laicity* which speaks of a way of being in the Church.

*Secularity*, “being in the world”, the immediate consequence of the Incarnation, leads to being situated in the world, recognizing the values that are proper to creation, to humanity, to historical evolution, and to cultures; at the same time it is dedicated to the transformation of the world, to its evangelization, within human structures. It is the commitment to the world in order to convert it to the Kingdom of God.

Secularity allows us to rise above the division between the sphere of the sacred and the profane sphere. At the very least it permits us to identify “holy spheres” simply as the signs that recall the presence of God and his Kingdom in the profane spheres. The equivalency between what is “sacred” and “the presence of God” as opposed to the “profane” and the “absence of God” fades away.



On overcoming that division the classical designation between agents and spheres (sacred and profane) likewise is canceled out. All the baptized are co-responsible agents in the process of mediation that brings salvation closer to history. And in this joint projection toward the world in order to carry out the common mission there will be no exclusive territories but rather a blending of ministries and services, in harmony with the gifts and charisms of each one.

*Laicity* is like the internal visage of secularity. It is the way of being that is manifested in a person, in a group of persons, when he or she is conscious of his dignity and responsibility as a human person, that are not bestowed upon him by any other person. The believer—the community of believers—lives this identity by faith, which is none other than the growth of awareness upon reflecting that both dignity and responsibility have their origin in the fact of having been created by God, redeemed by Christ and indwelt by the Spirit. “Only from inside the Church’s mystery of communion is the “identity” of the lay faithful made known, and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world be defined”. (*Christifideles Laici* 8.6)

This “transfer of characteristics” is mirrored in the existence, or better said, the co-existence, of the various ecclesial groups. A new relation is entered into thanks to the *common basis* found and the *complementarity* that appears as of benefit to both and, especially, for the common purpose:

*Encounter and collaboration among religious men, religious women, and lay faithful are seen as an example of ecclesial communion and, at the same time, they strengthen apostolic energies for the evangelization of the world. Appropriate contact between the values characteristic of the lay vocation, such as a more concrete perception of the life of the world, culture, politics, economy, etc., and the values characteristic of religious life, such as the radicality of the following of Christ, the contemplative and eschatological dimension of Christian existence, etc., can become a fruitful exchange of gifts between the lay faithful and religious communities. (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life: Fraternal Life in Community, n.70. Rome 1994).*

### 3. SHARING THE MISSION THROUGH THE SAME CHARISM.

For some years now the expression “*shared mission*” has been used in ecclesial circles and, more specifically, in what relates to religious congregations. By the term they want to point out that context of inter-relationship between the different ecclesial identities involved with the mission, indicating by this means its central motivation, which is none other than what justifies the existence of the Church itself: the mission. The mission goes before all else, the mission is what convokes us, by which we are united in the Church; it is what inspired the different congregations, and it is that which today is motivating the creation of the new charismatic and evangelical families. If today we can speak of a new form of *communion*, of new relations between those who make up the Church, it is, definitively, because a new reference to the mission has been established by those same components of the Church (or, if you prefer, because the Church has acquired a new level of consciousness respect to the mission).

#### 3.1 Sharing a particular mission in the Church.

The mission or evangelization is of such breadth that no one can entirely take in its scope “*in all its richness, complexity and dynamism*” (EN 17): it is everything that refers to the coming of the Kingdom of God to men, from the freedom from enslavements of all sorts, passing through the cultural purification, the growth of values, the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his message, the catechesis, until finally reaching the celebration of the faith in the sacraments and the contemplation of the Kingdom in prayer...

And now we must speak of the mission in a more particular and reduced sense: the mission that each Christian has, that each Christian community possesses, in that *small little acre in the Vineyard of the Lord* that He has entrusted to each one of us to cultivate, and for which we are especially responsible.

We cannot forget that our participation in the Church and in its mission of evangelization is not an anonymous one nor is it indiscriminate but it is fully personalized. Each person must discover his or her place in the common mission starting from one’s own gifts and qualities but also by the cries one should perceive of the necessities of the world and of the Church (cf. ChL 28.2).

What we have just described for each particular Christian can also be affirmed with regards to a “social subject”: a group, a community, an association, a movement, a charismatic family... Concretely, we can refer to the mission of the Lasallian Family: if this has a *proper identity* in the Church it is because it has a *specific mission*, through which it contributes to the great total mission of the Church. And if it has a specific mission it is because the Church recognizes that it has *its own charism*.

### 3.2 Charismatic dynamism.

We can now speak of the “charismatic community” or the “charismatic family” in the typically Pauline sense of the term: charism is a *dynamism* which runs through and gives impetus to the whole life of the community, both in each member as in the entirety.

In the language of the New Testament, *charism* is a *divine gift* granted to a person for the good of the community. In the final analysis, there is but one “Charism” given to men, and that is the Holy Spirit. Its presence in us is manifested as a great force, a dynamism which is bringing about the Kingdom of God among men and women.

When we speak of “charisms”, lower case, in the Christian sense, we are referring to the diverse forms which that dynamism of the Spirit acquires in each one of us (cf. 1Cor 12).

The charisms are granted to *all* because the Holy Spirit works in all of us (cf. 1Cor 12.6). Vatican Council II affirms: “*From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church.*” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 3)

### 3.3 Our particular “charisms”.

“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” (ChL 24).

*The natural aptitudes* of a person are converted into *charisms* when that person, moved by the Spirit, places them at the service of the community.

The action of the Spirit perfects, fine tunes, the natural ability as it separates it from selfish interests and, at times, attains *abilities that are totally new*. So, we find cases of persons, culturally and intellectually average, with an extraordinarily keen *charism of counsel or discernment* as proof that the Spirit has no need of depending on human wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 2,4-5).

Both the marital state and the celibate life can be lived as normal situations or “states of life”, but they may also be transformed into charisms: in a different form in each one of these two states, the person can aspire to the *perfection of love* and to the *service of the Community and of the Kingdom of God*. The Spirit is the giver to the one and to the other. Each must be faithful to the charism received. The community, the charismatic family will have to appreciate, discern and encourage the personal charisms, and assist in discovering those qualities, talents and spiritual gifts... which every person, through the urging of the Spirit, can put at the service of the community and of its mission.

### 3.4 The foundational charism, the charism of the family.

*“The fact that the charisms of founders and foundresses, having been born of the Spirit for the good of all, must once again be placed at the centre of the Church, open to communion and participation by all the People of God, is being increasingly discovered.”* (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting afresh from Christ*, 31. Rome 2002).

“Founding” a new way in the Church is, without a doubt, a gift or charism of the Spirit. The way opened up by the Founder or the Foundress is the origin of the charismatic family often developed at the birth of a religious congregation. His or her charism is the bond of union among all those who compose the family: *“These charisms are given to individual person, and can even be shared by other in such ways as to continue in time a precious and effective heritage, serving as a source of particular spiritual affinity among persons.”* (ChL 24.3). But it cannot be simply a bond of affection or of devotion for, as we have already said, the charism is a gift for the mission.

The action of the Spirit maintains and updates the charism. The foundational charism allows us to discover the mission, as it had with the

Founder or Foundress: it causes us to be attentive to *an external reality*. For example, in the case of de La Salle, the situation of the needs of children and youth was patent. But there is always *an interior attitude* present: the contemplation of the salvific plan of God, Who makes us to be his instruments.

The action of the Spirit causes us to feel *deeply touched* before that reality and impels us to *find it to be* like a call from God.

The charism bestirs us to look for concrete answers: the religious institution has been an historical answer. But the charism is still alive and impels religious men and women and other Christians to actualize the response in the context of the “shared mission” that fits the Church of today, “Communion of communities”, ministerial in its identity:

*The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate. In whatever activity or ministry they are involved, consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate “the most precious gift: the spirit”. For their part, the laity should offer Religious families the invaluable contribution of their “being in the world” and their specific service. (Vita Consecrata 55.2).*

The institutional charism appears, in this form, like an element that promotes those effects among all who share in the mission of the charismatic family:

- *It brings coherency* insofar as it combines the diverse identities - religious, seculars, priests - for the same mission: (in our case, *the human and Christian education of youth, especially of the poor*).
- *It differentiates*, insofar as it brings out specific lifestyles and particular gifts, even though all of them, in one way or another, are at the service of the one mission. Each one of those identities is seen as valuable and promoted, exactly in that aspect in which it stands out and makes it different from the others, and thus it makes the common mission that much richer, with the contributions of all.
- *It stimulates*, in the sense that each member of the community pushes forward to discover the diverse gifts that the Lord has be-

stowed “for the mission”, in order to give with them witness of the love of God: life, the education received, personal preparation, such and such qualities and talents, the ability to give with generosity...; or special gifts like the “discernment of spirits”, or the celibate life for the Kingdom (cfr. Mt 19,12), or knowing how to make a marriage a “joint project” for the commitment...

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Part**

### **The Lasallian Family: a shared charism**

Today's movement of participation in the Lasallian charism and, along with that, of formation in the Lasallian Family, is included and encounters its meaning in the ecclesial context described in chapter 1, and its theological foundation in the ecclesiology of communion, whose essential traits we saw in chapter 2.

Within this framework, the Lasallian Family develops its proper ecclesial identity, starting with the foundational charism, which produces a dynamism of association that today is spreading throughout the Lasallian Family. The construction of the Lasallian Family must take place around this charismatic core, rediscovering it and strengthening it as point of reference for all who form part of this Family. The reflection made by the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in these recent decades through its General Chapters has placed our steps more steadfastly along this path.





### III. The Lasallian Family, its road toward maturity

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The last forty years of Lasallian history have seen the gestation, the birth and the first steps of this small creature, the Lasallian Family, belonging to the new ecclesial ecosystem. The Lasallian charism ceases being identified exclusively with the vocation of the Brother and begins to incarnate itself in various states and ways of life through which it shares the Lasallian mission.

Let us see how this fabric came about in the light of the most decisive Lasallian happenings of these last 40 years.

#### 1. RECOGNITION OF THE POSITIVE ROLE OF THE LAY PEOPLE.

The 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (1966-1967) overcame the lack of trust or simple resignation which up to that time existed with regard to the participation of the lay educators in the educational works of the Institute. From being seen as “a lesser evil” (General Chapter of 1946) it comes to be seen in a positive light. The *Declaration of the Brother in the World of Today*, the principal document of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, established the bases to proceed along this path of communion and participation in the Lasallian charism on the part of the lay secular educators, even though the practical applications that it proposed were still very timid (cf. n° 46,3).

The following chapters continued widening the horizon until we reached the vision of the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter in the year 2000 which affirmed the road taken, adding: “*We have heard of numerous successful examples in various places, of our partners and Associates assuming leadership roles and contributing to the vitality of the Lasallian mission*” (Circular 447, p. 13), and the consequence that it foresees: “*It is time, therefore, for the Institute, strengthened by these successful examples and sustained by these promptings of the Spirit, to formalise this participation to a greater extent and recognise it both in principle and in fact*” (p. 13). More notable is the observation that it makes about the role of women in the Lasallian mission, well aware that the Chapter of 1946 had forbidden their presence in

the Lasallian School: “*We are glad to see that more women are now involved in the Lasallian mission, and are playing a more significant part in it*” (p. 22).

The 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (2007) no longer restricts the role of lay persons. It addresses the Brothers, urging them to take up the new ecclesial context as a challenge, to integrate themselves into it and to discover the specific role they should play within it. The very identity of the Brother is significantly affected by the new type of participation of lay persons in the Lasallian charism:

*Since the General Chapter of 1966-67 until the present day, the ecclesial and Lasallian context in which the Brothers are situated has changed substantially, thereby challenging us to adopt a new kind of presence: to live out and develop association for the educational service of the poor with men and women who participate in the Lasallian charism, spirituality and mission.*

*This new ecclesial and Lasallian context challenges us, as Brothers, to live association for the educational service of the poor in a way that is open and integrated with our Lasallian partners, especially with those who wish to associate themselves with us, and to ask ourselves about the specific role that we, as consecrated persons, should accomplish to support the work of everyone in the Lasallian mission. (Circular 455, 3, 2.1)*

## 2. CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING AND OFFICIAL PROCLAMATION.

The 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (1976) bore witness to the official commitment of some lay people with the Lasallian mission: these were the first members of the *Signum Fidei*. And that was the sign that something new was coming to birth in a broader context. The General Chapter became aware of it, described it in a document and invited the Brothers to become more familiar with all the members of the educational community, “*the different degrees of belonging to what is called ‘the Lasallian family’*” (Circular 403, Proposition n. 6).

The 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter (1986) addressed itself, now “officially”, to the whole Lasallian Family with a message from the Chapter itself and which it directed the General Council (proposition n° 6) to compose a letter which was published on February 2, 1989. The Chapter specified in its

message: *“When we speak of the LASALLIAN FAMILY we refer to that body of persons who make up those movements and groups all of which have been forming according to the spiritual and pedagogical experience of St. John Baptist De La Salle”*. And affirms: *“The Brothers’ communities (not the Brothers individually) constitute the ‘heart’, as it were, of this Lasallian experience, like a ‘faithful memory’ of the Lasallian Spirit”*. The Chapter went on to name very diverse groups which, according to it, constituted the Lasallian Family, identifying the Lasallian work of education as its principal bond of union and, not always, with Lasallian spirituality.

The Letter to the Lasallian Family listed this enumeration and description of groups that included the *“Communities of the Lasallian Sisters”* (even without naming the concrete Institutes), which, curiously, had been forgotten by the Chapter in its message. The Letter was addressed as well to the Lasallians of other religious denominations, distinct from the Christian faiths and it explicitly considered them to be *“as members of our Lasallian Family, members with their own specific spirituality”*.

Notice the two-fold concern which was maintained from the beginning, or more exactly, the tension between two poles that accompanied the entire development of the Lasallian Family:

- a) Making the Lasallian Family to be an overall “tent” or “umbrella” which could gather in all those who feel identified with the educational legacy of John Baptist de La Salle.
- b) Avoiding the fuzziness or the “it’s all good” inclusions. To the contrary, there are levels of gradations of greater or lesser participation in the Lasallian Family. For that purpose processes were established that would permit the deepening of Lasallian identity, becoming more and more committed to the mission, living the spirituality, developing the communion, etc.

### 3. THE WORK OF FIRING UP THE FOUNDATIONS.

The present Rule of the Brothers, approved in the General Chapter of 1986, makes a single explicit allusion to the Lasallian Family, and only in order to invite every community of Brothers to warmly welcome “the members of the Lasallian Family” (n° 64). There are several more signifi-

cant references to sharing the mission and to the spirituality (nos. 17 & 17c) with lay educators. Nevertheless, and this is the most important point, the Rule furnishes us with the *cornerstone* upon which we are able to build the Lasallian Family along the lines of Church-Communion. It does this in two articles, 20 and 146.

It all begins with the declaration, expressed in number 20, that the Lasallian charism belongs to the Church (“*The Spirit of God has given to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, a charism...*”), and this charism “*even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators*”. It indirectly affirms then, that the Institute is not the sole proprietor nor even the single beneficiary of that charism, which can be found in persons other than the Brothers.

Article 146 confirms and broadens these foundations of the Lasallian Family:

- Above all, it recalls the theological principle already set down in number 20, that it is the Church which is the principal depository and beneficiary of the gifts that will be shared: “*The spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded*”. Properly speaking, we can no longer say that it is the Institute that can share or not those gifts that comprise the Lasallian charism, for they belong to the treasury of the Church. It is the Spirit Who calls one group or others to participate in those gifts in the way that He judges convenient.
- It goes on to draw the first consequence that deeply implicates the Institute on recognizing that the Lasallian movements, those that we will call the “Lasallian Family” are a grace of God and a source of vitality for the Institute itself: “*The Institute sees the existence of the various Lasallian movements as a grace from God renewing its own vitality.*” This cannot be said unless the own Institute is felt to be integrated and involved in the whole picture. The Institute recognizes the vital importance on it and it is not a question of “take it or leave it” as we may please, for it is God Himself who calls upon us.
- The previous affirmation is established as the *active principle* leading the Institute to fully engage in association with lay Lasallians, and here the Rule enunciates briefly another facet of what we have called

the *cornerstone* of the Lasallian Family: the Lasallian charism can be for lay people, as it is for the Brothers, a way of living the Gospel, or of striving for evangelical perfection: “*The Institute can associate with itself lay people who want to lead the life of perfection that the Gospel demands, by living according to the spirit of the Institute and by participating in its mission.*” That is to say, the Lasallian charism provides diverse ways of living the Christian life in an integral manner and not simply in *ways of participating in the mission.*

Let us observe here that the language that the Rule utilizes and which we still encounter in the acts of the General Chapter of 2000 is not completely accurate, for after recognizing that the charism does not belong to it exclusively, it goes on speaking of the participation on the lay people in the spirit and the mission *of the Institute* (cf n° 17); that is, the Institute continues as the center around which all turns; it still does not treat of the spirit of the Lasallian Family or of the Lasallian charism, or the mission of the Church in which the Institute takes part with the other Lasallians.

- Finally, in that same article 146, what will be the essential criterion for the organization of the Lasallian Family is set down and brings with it an element of tension and vitality between two poles: the *autonomy* (which the Institute ought to facilitate) of the Lasallian movements and of the lay persons associated respect to the Institute, and at the same time the responsibility of the Institute in *creating the appropriate bonds* and of being the guarantor of *the authenticity of its Lasallian character*. Based on this criterion, the communion in the interior of the Lasallian Family acquires a specific character that should be the object of programming and effective structures.

Read now from the perspective of 2007 these two articles, 20 and 146 of the Rule, give us the impression that this *cornerstone* has still to be firmly cemented in and recognized as the essential point of reference for the construction of the Lasallian Family. It needs to be the objective of a much more systematic development in the coming years if we want to give consistency to the Lasallian Family in the context of Church-Communion. Numerous questions await clear answers and they come across as a challenge for the process that occupies us:

- What are those Lasallian “spiritual gifts” given to the Church that go beyond the limits of the FSC Institute? How are so many

charismatic gifts that for so much time seemed to be reserved to the Brother now extended to the whole Lasallian Family? (See, for example those which the Rule attributes to the Brother in articles 20 and 21).

- In what way the Lasallian Family renews the vitality of the FSC Institute and what must be done so that the Institute receives that vitality? How must the FSC Institute be inserted in the interior of the Lasallian Family in an active way, so that it may both give and receive vitality? How does the Brother encounter his own identity and the worth of his specific vocation within the Lasallian Family?
- What is the evangelical visage, or the evangelical life style that the Lasallian Family wishes to incarnate in the Church and, in which what is special for each Lasallian group or vocation will be seen?
- How can the Institute contribute to guarantee the authenticity of the Lasallian character in the different groups of the Lasallian Family? What is the prophetic role that is expected of the Brother in the Lasallian Family?

As we will see in the following sections, the reflection of the next General Chapters developed in essential accord with the principles already enunciated in the Rule and advanced in the responses to the questions above. But the task of firmly cementing the foundations of the Lasallian Family are far from being concluded.

#### 4. SHARED MISSION, IN THE CENTER OF THE LASALLIAN FAMILY.

The expression “shared mission” appeared for the first time in the Rule approved by the General Chapter of 1986, with the heading of n° 17 that stated: “*The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission*”. As we have observed, this mission still was not being couched in terms of the ecclesial mission that is shared in equality of rights by all Lasallians. That change of perspective will take time to become a reality.

The mindset is opening up little by little, in such a way that the mission comes to occupy the central place around which the entire Family comes together, its reason for being, until all its members are able to say, “our

mission". Brother John Johnston wrote in his Pastoral Letter to the Brothers as Superior General on January 1st, 1988:

*We accept that from now on our schools will not be "Brothers' schools", animated by the Brothers community with secondary collaboration of lay teachers, parents, students. They will be instead "Lasallian Schools", schools animated by Lasallian educative communities of faith "within which the apostolic activity of the Brothers' community takes place" (Rule 17a). (The Destiny of the Institut: Our Responsibility, p. 32).*

The 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter (1993) amply developed the concept of "shared mission" and made it a priority for the Institute for the following seven years. It especially saw it to be *as a sign of the times, "an integral part of our vocation as religious lay persons"* (Circular 435, p. 43), and invite the Districts to strengthen the close relationship between the "Lasallian Family" and the shared mission, and to integrate them more en more (pp. 45 y 47).

With that new perspective the concept of the "Lasallian Family" was enriched:

*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. For that reason, by a process of initiation, formation and accompaniment, the Districts, will stimulate groups among the Lasallian partners that will make possible a greater commitment. (Circular 435, Proposition 3).*

Observe the blending between "all" and "especially"; and, to underscore that greater intensity, *"The Districts will stimulate groups...to a greater commitment, by a process of initiation..."* "That is to say, this definition makes the Lasallian Family to be an *inclusive* concept for it takes in all those who, in one form or another, from the most superficial level to the most profound, participate in the *Lasallian educational project* (in itself also, an widely embracing concept which is not limited to the works or schools of the Institute of the Brothers). At the same time it supposes different grades of levels of belonging, as happens in every family. But it is not a static or invariable belonging but one dependent on a *process* that can advance a good deal or more slowly. The process of belonging to the Lasallian Family is developed by sharing the spirit and the mission of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

One event that took place in 2006 was a qualitative leap in the collective awareness as regards the mission and the Lasallian charism. This event was the International Assembly, "Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission," that had been prompted by the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter (2000). Almost 160 representatives from the entire Lasallian Family participated in this Assembly and among them were the highest authorities of the FSC Institute and of other Lasallian religious institutes. All participated equally with voice and vote. During the discussions in the Assembly it was made abundantly clear that the Lasallian mission is "*our mission*," "*that God has entrusted today through the Church to the Lasallian Family*" (Main orientation, number 2). It was also made clear that the responsibility to continue the Lasallian charism in the Church belongs to the entire Lasallian Family and that this 2006 Assembly is representative of that family. The language used in the Assembly marked a shift from "the mission of the Institute in which lay Lasallians participate" to "our mission," the Lasallian mission, done in common by all those who participate in the Lasallian charism, although from different vocations and states of life. This language was accepted by the 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (2007) (cf. Circular 455, Topic 3, Introduction).

## 5. THE DISTRICT, THE "FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE".

The 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter (1993) recognized the fact that the District was being accepted as "*the ambit (framework) of the Lasallian Family*" (Circular 435, p. 45). This localization will be emphasized by the following General Chapter on affirming: "As Districts already exist, it is natural they should called upon to be the frame of reference for all forms of association already in place, or that are going to be adopted." (Circular 447, p.9).

This "localization" appears to be significant in order to provide an effective structure for the Lasallian Family, to ensure the fabric of relations that bring about belongingness and solidarity and, most definitively, communion for the mission.

## 6. THE LASALLIAN STORY AND THE POLE OF ASSOCIATION.

In 1997 the General Council published an important study that consid-



ered how the new stage of the shared mission of Brothers/Lay People would be as it now formed a cohesive part of the whole Lasallian story. Its title: *“The Lasallian Mission of Human and Christian Education: A Shared Mission”*. The following passage allows us to see the manner in which this was developing:

*Association, such as it was lived by the Brothers, had a deep impact on the organization and functioning of their schools. It was a decisive factor in helping their cohesion, efficiency and creativity. Today, under new forms still to be invented, the same spirit of association should continue to inspire and give life to the Lasallian Schools where Lasallian partners are the great majority. The challenge now is for the Brothers and all other Lasallian educators to discover together in open dialogue how to found and promote in new foundations the associative dimensions of their commitment on behalf of the human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor (3.31).*

The great value of this document lies in the way in which it tells the whole story: it details the Lasallian narrative from the beginnings with the Founder and its continuity within the Church and society of today with the new forms. The unity of the narrative is brought about by the spirit of association, the pole of association.

The contribution of the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter (2000) is situated in this narration, arising like the mature fruit of the process that preceded it and, at the same time, as the official commencement of a new stage. The fact that this theme was already assumed as the title of the Chapter was very significant: *Associated for the educational service of the poor as the Lasallian response to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. It seems to be the Lasallian response to the challenge launched by John Paul II to the whole Church in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, with which he greeted the new millennium: *“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 ...”* (NMI 43).

The Chapter interpreted our history in the light of the present moment, and reciprocally, it discovered the light that flows in both directions. It identified the crux where these came together and from which the consistency of our story springs: *“The foundation event which links the Institute today to its origins is that of June 6<sup>th</sup> 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” (Circular 447, p. 2). And it sees this crux, or knot, as the inspiring force that comes right down to us: “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” (p. 3).*

And the awareness of that light that comes from the original times opens up to the new reality, the new force that is coming to us today from those who are becoming part of this history with new forms of living the same charism:

*The development of the Lasallian Mission requires the Institute to allow itself to be stimulated by the dynamism apparent among partners and associates, and to encourage and support collaboration among themselves and with the Brothers, so that all can deepen their own understanding of association, in the light of the observations made, the Lasallian charism and the present theology of the Church (p. 3).*

## 7. LASALLIAN FAMILY - LASALLIAN ASSOCIATION.

The 43<sup>rd</sup> General chapter (2000) has not spoken explicitly of the Lasallian Family. It has done so implicitly with all its reflection on Association. And in this manner has made the Lasallian Family its most important contribution from that time to the present by offering a typically charismatic reading of the Lasallian Family, a reading centered on the Lasallian charism and marked by the dynamisms that the charism awakens.

Let us not forget what are the charismatic families in the new Church of communion: each one of them is the result of communion for the ecclesial mission starting with the foundational charism of the family. Communion for the mission in the Lasallian sense holds a typical charismatic expression: it is the *association for the educational service of the poor* (an abbreviated expression for “*association for the human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor*” [cf. Rule 3], to which this must always be referred so as to not weaken its meaning).

Participation in the Lasallian Family should be animated by the associative commitment for the educational service to the poor. The Lasallian as-

sociates as a whole form the *stable nucleus* of the Lasallian Family which is essential for its survival and of the charism that is incarnated in it.

“Lasallian Family” is the structure that lends body to “Lasallian association for the educational service to the poor” in the context of Church-Communion. Its stable nucleus is a *communion of communities* associated among themselves for the Lasallian mission. Going beyond that stable nucleus, the “association for the educational service to the poor” is seen to be like the charismatic core of the entire Lasallian Family and the power of attraction that brings together the other groups and individual persons around the Lasallian mission at diverse levels and degrees of participation.

### 7.1 The constitution of the “stable nucleus” of the Lasallian Family.

The reflection of the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter contained in the official acts (Circular 447), apart from the explicit propositions approved by the Chapter, provides us with very valuable orientations to continue building upon the Lasallian Family, in this case for the constitution of its “stable nucleus”.

The Chapter made reference to the “intentional groups”, that is, “*when their members, in response to an interior call, come together voluntarily to practise some aspects of Lasallian life, each group choosing a particular type of life and the length of their members’ commitment*” (p. 5) (we will soon see what those characteristics are), and recognized the actual existence of “*Intentional Lasallian groups*”: the Lasallian Institutes of consecrated life and some lay groups (among those, *Signum Fidei*), as well as persons who, in individual form, associate themselves through an intentional group, a community of Brothers, or a District, etc. (p. 5).

Further on it signaled the norm in order to constitute what we have come to call a “stable nucleus”: “*Consequently, we recognise 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*” (p. 6).

Besides that “stable nucleus”, the Chapter considered other Lasallian groups, of different types of structure, which are more or less close to the nucleus of “*intentional groups*” and who could even enter into that nu-

cleus, if they choose to do so. There is an element that joins all those groups, although they have not adopted a juridical structure: *“They exist because their members have developed links and relationships, and have adopted projects, and have done so with explicit reference to the Lasallian charism which they share”* (p. 6). And the Circular names various groups as examples of that diversity: *“Lasallian teams, teams of educators and teachers, joining forces temporarily to respond to the specific needs encountered by young people in difficulty, Christian Lasallian communities, volunteers, Lasallian Youth, young people doing missionary work, former pupils, parents of students...”* (p. 6). It is a constellation of groups at whose center is the Lasallian mission. Entrance into the closest circles, in the ones that sustain and guarantee the mission, is done “intentionally”, that is, by wanting to be associated with the Lasallian mission, but after having gone through a process during which a person gradually acquires the Lasallian identity.

## 7.2 The process of moving into the interior of the Lasallian Family.

The 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter has briefly described, but with exactitude, the journey that leads toward the interior of the Lasallian Family, which also bestows the Lasallian identity as a result. In synthesis we can express it like this: it is a process of communion for the mission, animated by the Lasallian charism and enlightened by the Lasallian spirituality.

*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, p. 4).

## 8. CHARISMATIC LINES OF FORCE FOR AN EVANGELICAL FAMILY.

At the interior of the Lasallian Family the charism generates lines of force which radiate out from the center toward the outside:

- Firstly, from the groups and the persons that live this association most intensely, towards all those groups and persons that participate in it in a partial way or who are beneficiaries of the mission;
- In second place, those lines of force direct the whole Lasallian Family to be as a body a face of the Gospel for the Church and for society. It is the face of the Gospel that the Lasallian charism puts in evidence and which is traced out in the journey and the message written by the Founder.

Most likely this will be an aspect to be developed in the future: on one side, the identification of the features of that evangelical face that the whole Lasallian Family wishes to show to the Church and society; and on the other, to throw into relief the particularity of the distinct existential projects at the interior of the Lasallian Family.

Some recommendations of the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter have already pointed out this sense:

*“That each Lasallian, each Lasallian group and each Lasallian programme of renewal for formation adopt the following guiding principles:*

- *FAITH sharing (this makes possible inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue),*
- *SERVICE of the poor through education,*
- *COMMUNITY building.”* (Recommendation 9)

*“...all Lasallian establishments stress in their educational programmes the following characteristics which should identify them clearly as being ours:*

- *the sense of community and fraternity as a response to individualism and loss of identity;*
- *the fight against poverty and situations of injustice;*
- *education for justice and peace, tolerance and solidarity;*
- *formation of persons who are both just and free.”* (Recommendation 11)

For its part, the 2006 International Assembly brought a series of proposals to the attention of the entire Lasallian Family. These proposals carry within them these charismatic strong lines:

- The community dimension: the Assembly was aware that within this dimension lies our charismatic strength to serve the mission, and it is also the condition that we need to fulfill if we want to be a sign for the world. Therefore, the Assembly asks that there be diverse forms, creating community relational spaces within educational works, accompanying and making known the experiences of new communities, promoting adult communities as a reference point for young people, encouraging groups of young Lasallians to live the values of faith, fraternity, and service (cf. Main orientations, numbers 2, 4, 6).
- Association for mission, in which the original Lasallian charism is made manifest and expressed. Association is part of the community dimension, but it goes beyond the limits of space and time of a local community. Each associate, who may belong to a local community, personalizes this belonging in order to integrate it within a sense of belonging to the great community of Lasallian associates who serve the educational mission where they are needed. The Assembly requested that experiences in association be encouraged, as well as processes and life journeys that lead to association today, and it proposed new structures that represent all members of the Lasallian Family (cf. Main orientations 6, 7, 8).
- A special preference for the poor as the principal targets of the mission among children and young people. The Assembly recounted it this way to the whole Lasallian Family: “The vitality of our mission depends upon how we, who associate ourselves with one another, respond to the needs of the poor. We value the effort that Lasallians make to liberate the poor from their different forms of poverty and we ask everyone to consider service to the poor and the promotion of justice as the heart and the main source of strength of the Lasallian Mission in the world” (Main orientation, number 5). The Assembly asked for special sensitivity towards the poor and young people who are at risk, those who are in extreme situations and new circumstances of exclusion and marginalization. The Assembly asked for special creativity to pro-

duce integration and hope where there has only been marginalization (cf. Main orientations 1, 3, 5, 7).

The 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (2007) has now made explicit this awareness of representing together the face of the Gospel based on the Lasallian charism, and the fact that this charism goes beyond the limits of the institutional Church:

*The Lasallian charism has become a focal point for many believing educators who discover the worth of their mission through the journey and spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle and who together, in this way, offer to the Church and the world, a living witness of the Gospel.*

*We see with joy that educators of other religions or without religious affiliation find in this charism an important source of inspiration that motivates them in their educational work. (Circular 455, 3, 2.2.1)*





## IV. The Lasallian Charism, the central core of the Lasallian Family

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### 1. A COMMON CHARISM FOR THE COLLECTIVE IDENTITY.

At the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter there was a notable preoccupation to clarify the *identity for the Lasallian mission* to foster a formation and a shared reflection on that theme, among the various Lasallians, both religious and lay. This clarification was seen like a condition in order to emphasize and impel the processes of development of the Lasallian association for the educational service to the poor. The first propositions and recommendations of the Chapter intended to deal with that preoccupation.

The construction of the Lasallian Family faces us with the challenge of determining exactly with sufficient clarity in what the Lasallian identity exists based on the Lasallian charism, an identity that can be incarnated in different forms of Christian life (and, perhaps, of other beliefs). What elements must be kept in mind as ones that are indispensable?

This challenge must be taken up in a two-fold direction:

– Within the Lasallian Family:

Recover the Lasallian charism in its Christian originality; more widely considered than in the form that it has historically been lived out (that of the Brother).

Recognize its essential core, outside of which one cannot speak of the Lasallian charism.

Help the members of the Lasallian Family to identify themselves deeply with this charism and to discover which particular emphases or particular forms of living it out they contribute as enrichment to the whole Lasallian Family.

– Outside the Lasallian Family:

Present the Lasallian charism before the Church in its unity and diversity of forms. On certain occasions, this presentation might require shades of a challenging nature. On other occasions, the presentation

might acquire a legal character vis-à-vis civil or ecclesiastical society, for example, taking charge of the educational orientation or direction of a school.

**1. That which unites the members of the Lasallian Family** is participation in the same charism, the Lasallian charism, and as a result, the reference to Saint John Baptist de La Salle, first depository of the foundational charism, master and guide for the whole Lasallian Family in the discerning and living out of the charism.

The Lasallian charism is a gift of the Spirit for service of the ecclesial mission and it brings with it an integral perspective or interpretation of Christian living. John Baptist de La Salle reads salvation history with this charismatic perspective and offers it to us in a comprehensive way in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, and in a partial way in many of his other writings.

Charism is a strength, a way of looking at things, a certain sensitivity when confronted with requirements, which in our case are the educational requirements of the poor and of youth. We thus become responsible and aware of solutions to those need: and are able to choose the best of them for the particular requirement of the moment.

Our Lasallian charism helps us to discern that it is the poor and youth who are our special concern and when we educate others we still bear in mind that our main concern is the poor and youth. We are able to recognise various kinds of poverty, but it is economic poverty which is our main objective, because other kinds of poverty often have their origin in economic poverty.

The Lasallian charism constantly challenges us to convert each school or program of education into a project of evangelization in which the person of the student is the center of the process and where Jesus and his Gospel form the horizon that guides the process.

The Lasallian charism, thus understood, is a foil to whatever forms it can be lived out, whether it be the consecrated life (such as that of the Brother) or the lay life, and it is also a foil to whatever foundations have come after or will come, prompted by the same dynamism of the Lasallian charism, which encounters new forms of development in service of the educational mission of the poor.

## **2. The Lasallian charism is a way of living communion for the mission.**

The Lasallian Family is the universal expression of this communion for the mission in the Lasallian charism, and constitutes itself as a communion of communities.

The community appears as the most decisive and prophetic characteristic of the Lasallian charism: living the community as response to the mission of education the poor, the children and youth. The sign of the community is, probably, the best identifier of a Lasallian program. We are not speaking of “a type of community”, but of a community dynamism which, first of all, creates bonds among the persons and, continuing on and simultaneously, is structured in diverse forms of community, according to the culture, the personal processes, the identities, etc., and according to the invitations that the Spirit is suggesting to us. The same dynamism produces communion between the diverse communities, giving rise to the district community, or to the various Lasallian institutions or to the Lasallian Family.

The communion of the Lasallian spirit characterizes itself as a lay fraternity. Other charismatic families emphasize the animating role of religious priests in the family ensemble. The Lasallian Family holds its lay character, or better, its lay fraternity, within its characteristic marks, which is not in opposition to the presence of priests within itself. No prior hierarchy or other type of dependency for sacramental reasons establishes itself, rather only that which underlines equal dignity, full fraternity.

The community is a gift of the Lasallian charism. It comes to us as a seed and it is up to us to make it germinate, grow and mature. We have to ensure this growth in a community setting with the mission in mind. We have to forge ever stronger links in the fraternity, links deeper than mere mutual empathy aimed at the mutual help of those in the group. Our Lasallian identity grows so long as we try to encourage this fraternity whose objective is the educational service of the poor, not only by drawing up efficient teaching programmes, but by being examples of the kind of person we want to educate, that is persons solidly fraternal, and in the final analysis, men and women who follow the teachings of Jesus.

**3. In the center of the Lasallian Family is the mission,** this piece of the ecclesial mission toward which the Lasallian charism draws us and which we are wont to define as “the human and Christian education of the young,

especially of the poor.” The Lasallian Family gathers itself around the mission and in order to give a better response to the mission.

The concern for attaining the highest objectives in the Lasallian educational mission, such as full evangelization and explicit catechesis, or commitment to those most in need, are not the exclusive matter of religious brothers or sisters, but rather of all those who participate to the fullest extent of the Lasallian charism.

We begin each step of the journey by enquiring about the needs of those we deal with, in other words the needs of real people. We are not satisfied with simply imparting knowledge and skills; these must be taught in the context of community and the Gospel.

**4. The Lasallian charism gives rise to a spirituality.** This experience of the ebb and flow of regard for the God of Salvation and regard for the young we have to save, is known in Lasallian terminology as the “spirit of faith and of zeal”.

On this journey of mission and contemplation we discover ourselves and realise the need of cultivating the spirit which makes sense of all we do and of all that we are. That is how the Lasallian spirituality evolves, a *spirituality of mediation*. We ourselves are links between the God who saves and the poor who need to be saved. And the need we have of finding reasonable answers for the poor, causes to have recourse to God for the gifts we need in our mission.

Through it we discover the kind of community we have to form and the kind of education we have to impart as God’s work and we recognise ourselves as representatives of Jesus Christ.

Spirituality is a search for meaning. The Founder outlined this spirituality with great objectivity when he pointed out that the word of God is our best guide to enlightening and rewarding our search.

## 2. THE VOW OF ASSOCIATION: A SIGN FOR THE COLLECTIVE IDENTITY.

### 2.1 The re-encounter of the Brother with his original identity.

This present phenomenon of the association of lay persons around a charism which until recently was considered as belonging to religious is

not exclusive to the Lasallian world for we find it nowadays all over the ecclesial world and around many religious congregations. Of course, we have to stress that in the Lasallian world *associated* has a special flavour, its own emotive charge, or more exactly, represents the Lasallian charism itself. The Lasallian charismatic expression of communion for the mission is *the association for the educational service to the poor*, and is represented in the vow that bears the same name.

Associated for the mission is the most decisive experience in the Lasallian story, the experience which is in the deepest root of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and sustains their own identity. It is necessary to refer to it to be able to understand what we mean to say today by “association” in the context of the Lasallian Family.

The Brothers are today committed to recovering “association” as the central axis of their identity as Brothers, of their own consecrated life, as it was from 1694 onwards. Thanks to it they are a *brotherhood for the educational mission* and for that reason are sign, as community, for the entire Lasallian Family of the charism and identity that this family desires to incarnate for the Church. That challenge is identified with the renewed awareness of the meaning and importance of the Vow of Association in the consecration and identity of the Brother.

The recovery began to occur around 1966-67, with the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, at the same time that, in a parallel manner, another awareness was beginning in the Institute of the Brothers: that lay persons could also participate in the Lasallian charism up to the point of associating with the Institute of the FSC for the Lasallian mission. The 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (1976) gave a great importance to this vow of association by means of a serious study of the origins. And the 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter (1986) decided to take it up again and include it explicitly in the Formula of Vows and in the Rule with this expression: *Association for the educational service to the poor*.

The General Chapter of 2000 was the pinnacle of this double progression: at the same time as association is being openly proposed to lay persons, the Brother is invited to think about his own identity from the perspective of the vow of association. The event of 1694 was highlighted, the consecration of John Baptist de La Salle and twelve Brothers, by means of the vow of association for the educational service of the poor, as the axis around

which the entire Lasallian story revolves, including the new chapter which is beginning to be written.

Besides recovering the unity of our history, the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter gave the key for the reordering of the parts of the totality, taking as a reference point the vow of association:

*The consecration of the Brother should be re-interpreted in terms of its evangelical character, and in the light of the specific vow of 'association for the educational service of the poor' (Circular 447, page 51).*

The only thing that was missing was to make explicit that recovery in the vow formula, a step which, in light of previous reading, seemed a purely logical one, and thus this was done in the 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (2007) (Cf. Circular 455, 3, 1.3.2).

*... Based on our foundational roots, we Brothers have, in the same way, rediscovered our consecrated identity in light of our vow of Association for the educational service of the poor and it is through it that we attempt to clarify our understanding of the other vows (44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, Circular 455, 3, Intr.).*

With the perspective that we have today of our beginning and of the thinking of the Founder, with the light that comes to us from the current reflection within the Church on its own mystery and on the meaning of Religious Life, we can say that the vow of association, at the beginning and today, represents the Brother's identity, as well as the charism and the finality of the Institute.

*We, as Brothers, recover the inspiration and the original motivation of the vow of association for the educational service of the poor. We live our identity as consecrated people as a prophetic sign of the identity of the Church, a mystery of communion. The communion of the Brothers is source and fruit of the mission that we accomplish (cf. Christifideles laici 32.4). Aware of the meaning of our consecration, we offer ourselves to the whole Lasallian Family as examples of communion and spirituality in order to give a Gospel foundation to the whole mission of the Lasallian educators. (Cf. Circular 455, 3, 1.2.1).*

The immediate result of Lasallian consecration is a fraternity in which its members are fully available to build community and to implement its purpose, not only in the local environment but also universally. In a certain sense, consecration breaks the limitations of the community in space and time.

## 2.2 The Brothers in the Lasallian Family: sign and contribution.

What part should the Brothers play in the new Lasallian Association, with such a variety of identities feeling themselves united in the same charism? This is a question to be answered within a tension that is generated between these two poles:

- The first pole is the conscious affirmation of this experience: the Brothers overall and each community in particular, continue representing in a special way the Lasallian project begun by the Founder, since it is they who incarnate it in the form that is closest to that which John Baptist de La Salle set in motion.
- The second pole is generated as one becomes aware of the new Church reality in which the Brother ought to live his vocation, the new bonds of communion, the new way of sharing the mission of the Church, the living together with so many different identities that participate in the Lasallian charism.

Within this tension the Brothers discover the specific contribution which the Lasallian Family needs from them today, and which is shown in these three images which the recent Chapters have used: *heart, memory and guarantee* of the Lasallian charism. These are three functions which we Brothers must take on in a significant manner, even though other members of the Lasallian Family could take them on as well under different forms. In order to do this:

- The Brothers need to accept responsibility for communicating to the whole Lasallian Family the experience of their fraternity, and to promote within it the spirituality of communion, as the true blood which gives life to all those who associate to form this Family.
- They must leave behind the community closed in on itself and build a community which “exports” communion, integrates into communion and offers itself as a place for experiencing communion.
- They ought to be more attentive to the cry of the poor, turning to them with a clear preference and communicating this same sensitivity and urgency to other Lasallians.
- As a “living memory” of the Founder they have to situate themselves as the enlightening, and if necessary critical, conscience in the new structures of association.

- Above and beyond their educational activities with children and young people, they have to agree to become the mediators of the light which God has put in their hearts, with regard to the other educators with whom they share the Lasallian mission, to help them discover the meaning and value of their educational work.
- They need to change the mentality of being the main leaders in order to learn to be more in the same position as the other actors in the mission. They need to preoccupy themselves more with promoting and receiving the signs of the other Lasallians, giving an impetus to the new communities of Lasallians, sharing among the diverse Lasallian communities and, when the needs of the mission require it, participating in mixed communities.
- The Brothers make association the central axis of their identity and they live it as consecration. As a last resort it is this vital and global commitment which converts them, as a community, into guarantors of the Lasallian charism, and in the measure in which they live it with intensity they will be a sign which will attract many other persons to also reinforce, with their lives and their commitment, this project of ministerial fraternity for the Christian education of the poor.



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Part

# Organization and institutionalization of the Lasallian Family

This is time of creation and experimentation. And we must assume the risks that go with those actions. The Lasallian Family is a new creature that is part of the Church-Communion and both its internal organization as well as its ecclesial function must be managed with new paradigms and new criteria of communion. And at the same time, minding the originality of our charism.

The Lasallian Family needs appropriate structures if it is to grow, exercise its mission and come to be recognized externally. However, only those structures that are useful should be put into place and not those that might impede growth, creativity and diversity within the communion. Neither will it be good policy to copy the structures proper to a religious institute (chapters, councils, etc.,) in order to reproduce them in this new organism that is the Lasallian Family.



## V. Leads for efficiently organizing the Communion

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We understand the Lasallian Family to be like a *communion of communities united by the Lasallian charism at the service of the mission of education*.

The organization possible for the Lasallian Family has as its purpose to ensure the priority of communion among all the Lasallian groups and institutions formed around the Lasallian charism.

This organization must train and prepare the Lasallian Family to:

- represent before the Church and transmit the unity of the Lasallian charism together with the diversity of its accentuations and existential projects;
- favor communion and communication between Lasallian groups and institutions; sharing the resources, developing joint initiatives;
- promote collective discernment and the coordination of responses, in view of better efficiency for the mission.

### ORIENTATIONS:

#### 1. The basic structure:

**1.1 The sociological concept “family”**, on which is based the model of “charismatic family” that we are considering, has three complementary elements in itself:

- *The primary nucleus*, where the relational bonds are very strong and the commitment of solidarity among its members is utmost. The primary nucleus in the charismatic family is made up of groups that are fully identified with the charism and solidly committed to the mission. This nucleus constitutes the official face of the family and represents the foundational charism before the Church. Here we will call it the “*stable nucleus*” of the Lasallian Family. This stable nucleus is equivalent to the combined “*intentional Lasallian groups*”, according to the terminology employed by the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter (Circular 447, pages. 5-6).

- *The surrounding scene of groups and individuals* that participate in partial aspects of the family. Here we are dealing with very diverse groups who are seen to be within the sphere of influence of the family for various reasons: for being in the process of integration in the stable nucleus of the family, for regularly collaborating in the mission of the family, for being or having been beneficiaries of the mission of the family, for being “fans” of what the family represents, etc.
- *A process of initiation.* One does not become part of a family by the simple fact of signing a paper or receiving a title. Incorporation into a family requires a period of assimilation of blood, of developing the sense of mutual belonging, of the increase of personal relationships, of appropriation of the values and the culture and, especially, of a commitment to the interests of the family. The charismatic family needs a process of absorption or communication of the spirit or charism of the family, a process that helps the persons and the groups of the *surrounding scene* to advance toward the interior of the family. In this process, unlike the norms of previous periods, the mission, the spirituality, the communion and the reference to the Founder as master and guide are considered to be inseparable. The accents may vary but not one of the four elements can be totally absent.

**1.2 The borders of the family** surrounding scene can be quite wide, if we wish to gather in everyone who maintains some relation with the mission or the spirit of the family. But in this case there comes a moment, in the circles furthest from the center, in which the family ceases to be such, and these become a *movement*, where the sense of belonging, the interpersonal relationships and the commitment to the mission can be very watered down. The strength of the movement continues to reside in that *communion of communities* that comprise the authentic charismatic family.

## 2. The responsibility of the initiative.

**2.1 The Institute of the Brothers**, because of its historical direct reference to St. John Baptist de La Salle, has the primary moral responsibility at the vanguard of the Lasallian charism in the Church, not only in what refers to its continuity, but also for the recognition of its fundamental elements (or essential nucleus of the charism). And for the same reason

it also has the responsibility to initiate the launching of the Lasallian Family. It must provide a leadership without paternalism for the other Lasallian institutions. So then, its primary function is to develop the communion and then facilitate the organization of the Family itself based on the communion.

**2.2 The birth and the development of the Lasallian Family** comes about, especially, at the local level and, it is there, particularly, where the Institute of the Brothers must exercise the initiative: in each district and region, those in charge must do all that is possible to move it forward, keeping in mind that “promoting the Lasallian Family” is synonymous with “promoting the association for the Lasallian mission”.

**2.3 The decision for pro-activity regarding the Lasallian Family** must begin by the conversion of the Institute itself toward the Lasallian Family, advancing in the paths already specified by the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter:

- In the way the mission is realized: it is necessary to promote a shared seeking, the co-responsible elaboration of projects, and the subsidiary actions of all who share in the mission.
- In the way the charism is lived: fostering its study and deeper understanding among the Lasallian believers.
- In the ways to be associated with the mission: promoting the birth and development of Lasallian groups, with or without the Brothers, “which will reflect on its identity for the Lasallian mission and develop forms of association” (43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter, Proposition n° 1).
- In the pastoral ministry of vocations: proposing the Lasallian charism before the particular Lasallian vocations, and showing how these are complementary one to the others.

**2.4 The leadership of the Institute begins** by making good use of the resources at our disposal so that they may serve the entirety of the Lasallian Family, for example, placing the central services of the Institute at the disposal of the other Lasallian institutions that, because of their small size and limited resources, are not able to take advantage of this assistance: the Secretariats for Formation, Mission and Association, Lasallian Publications, etc... A new district and regional frame of reference has to be outlined at the same time, so that the resources and the structures that the Institute possesses on those levels are utilized, such as formation, tech-

nical and pedagogical consultation, pastoral orientation,... are offered to other Lasallian institutions present within the geographical territories of the districts. Perhaps thought can eventually be given to jointly organizing all of these services, both international and district...

### 3. Personal incorporation into the Lasallian Family:

**3.1 Since the Family is a *communion of communities***, belonging to the Family is established through the communities incorporated to it (in its stable nucleus or in its surrounding circles). Individual adhesion to the *whole* is not possible except through a concrete community that is already recognized as part of the Family, like a small Lasallian community, a district or an institution.

**3.2 The integration of a person into the *stable nucleus* of the Lasallian Family** comes about, then, by the integration of that person in any of the *intentional Lasallian groups* or groups associated for the Lasallian mission. This integration is the fruit of a mutual recognition, one that is sufficiently precise and agreed upon, that is only arrived at following a certain maturation in the process of incorporation. In this process the person gradually assumes the charism or spirit of that family, integrates himself into the entirety of relations, enters in to become part of the story that already is a long narration, with a story line and a plot development that impart unity to the narration, participates in the mission so that he feels it to be his own, is saturated with the spirituality that reveals the sense of the mission, and becomes a disciple of the Founder. In the Lasallian Family this process, guided by the Lasallian charism, is a process of *association for the Lasallian mission of education*.

**3.3 The five *Lasallian characteristics of reference*** that the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter set down to map the pathway of association, continue being a fundamental guide to orient the process:

- *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, p. 4).

**3.4 The recognition of a person as an associate** of an intentional Lasallian group can be done in an official or formal way, but it can also come about in an implicit manner, or simply understood, a type of recognition based on the “day to day”, on the implicit acceptance of mutual belonging and of the common spirit that animates us.

#### **4. Constitution of the “stable nucleus” of the Lasallian Family.**

The make-up of the Lasallian Family’s *stable nucleus* is the most decisive step in order that the Lasallian Family can begin to consider itself a reality. The most essential structures permitting the Lasallian Family to function will depend on this *stable nucleus*.

The *stable nucleus* takes shape on two fronts: universal (international) and local (or district):

a) The international Lasallian institutions or, at least, those above district level, recognized ecclesiastically or by some General Chapter up to the present, and those that in the future will be recognized by the Council of the Lasallian Family. At the present time: The Guadalupana Sisters of de La Salle, The Lasallian Sisters of Vietnam, the Catechists of Jesus Crucified, Signum Fidei, together with the Brothers’ Institute.

b) The local, district or regional groups:

- The groups of lay persons formally associated with any one of the universal institutions mentioned previously.
- The Lasallian communities of laity incorporated in the districts, even if they are not considered “formally associated”.
- Those lay people who, without being formally associated, are normally recognized as associates in the districts, and they accept being incorporated into this stable nucleus of the Lasallian Family.

For organizational purposes, the persons who are individually associated to a district and the groups integrated into a district that do not belong to an institution or intra-district federation already established, can be considered together as “a group of associates of District N.”

## 5. Building the primary links of communion on the international level.

**5.1 *Principal Animator*:** President, “Major” Brother, Coordinator... what name is most appropriate?

As the Brothers’ Institute is the direct heir of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and, as things stand at present, the Lasallian institution which best channel and bind the efforts of all Lasallians in the common mission, the ministry of communion and animation of the entire Lasallian Family, can be well justified in being attributed to the Superior General of the Brothers, but this conferral will have to be agreed upon by all the representatives of the Lasallian Family, or more exactly, by the stable nucleus of the Lasallian Family.

**5.2 *The Lasallian Family Council*,** consisting of representatives from the stable nucleus of the Lasallian Family. It should be made clear how they are going to be represented in it, on the one hand, the universal or inter-district institutions; and on the other, the groups associated through the district. Equally, the possible representation in this Council of other Lasallian organizations and movements that do not form part of the stable nucleus, at least at that moment, but they do in the more or less close surrounding ambit.

**5.3 *The International Assembly*,** which accomplishes the functions of communion in the Lasallian charism, a forum for sharing experiences and for discerning the calls and responses in and of the mission. It could be the continuation of the experience begun with the International Assembly “Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission” of 2006.

**5.4 *The Identity Card of the Lasallian Family*.** It will be necessary to specify on the Card the unrenounceable elements of the Lasallian charism, so that each member of the Lasallian Family pledges to uphold, the objectives, the ways of belonging, the basic structures of animation...

In this working out they will have to keep in mind different levels in order to facilitate the interventions of the different members of the Lasallian Family or its representatives.

## 6. Developing the Lasallian Family in districts.

It would be more exact to say: *organizing and refounding the districts in the*



*context of the Lasallian Family.* The new District allows for the concrete practice of communion which should exist among the different groups and institutions of the Lasallian Family to serve the mission “together and by association” (educational service of the poor) based on fidelity to the Lasallian charism:

1. Establishing an authentic collaboration between all the Lasallian institutions that work in the same geographical territory: Brothers, Sisters, Catechists of Jesus Crucified, Signum Fidei, other Lasallian Communities... 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.
2. It guarantees that formation in the Lasallian charism reaches all its members.
3. It promotes human relationships, and, based on them, communion among the Lasallian communities and among the members of these communities. It looks after every associate to provide them a community of reference.
4. 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).
5. 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.
6. Expanding structures of effective participation for all Lasallians, especially associates, in mission: Mission Council, Mission Assembly. Other structures developed with success in certain districts: The Lasallian Partners Council (District of the Philippines. See Bulletin 250, 7.2), Community of District Animation (District of Argentina)...
7. 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.
8. The new District is not the result of the overall indifference of Lasallians, but the fundamental communion of many Lasallians of different identities. The communion and participation of all asso-

ciates must be combined with a healthy autonomy as regards each identity. Differences among the various identities are not hidden but they are valued and cultivated as a treasure for the whole group.

### **7. Openness of the Lasallian Family. The communication of the charism.**

The Lasallian Family will branch out to expand as an ecclesial movement and branch out to include all those who collaborate in one form or another in the Lasallian educational project, and include all those who receive the benefits of this mission. Nevertheless, this affirmation would be meaningless if it did not translate itself into a vigorous exertion of communicating the charism to those who approach to participate in the mission.

The communication of the charism (the “lifeblood” of the family) concretizes itself in many diverse ways: dignifying the teaching profession, discovering the evangelizing mission in educational works, communicating Lasallian spirituality, transmitting Lasallian pedagogy, cultivating a sensitivity toward the recipients most in need of the mission, sharing responsibilities and the direction of educational projects, etc., also arriving at economic solidarity when necessity requires, with collaborators in the mission.

### **8. The promotion of the common culture and new expressions.**

A family, a common charism, a collective identity. And at the same time, diverse specific charisms, different identities and life projects. How are we going to feel united while respecting diversity at the same time? And how can we be sure that the unity is not simply repetitive of the inherited expression or of the expression creation by only one very concrete part of the family?

The Lasallian Family needs a common culture for all the members of the Family, one in which all can recognize themselves, while at the same time it has to cover the many cultural expressions proper to each group and institution, each existential project, geographic area, etc.

The collective Lasallian identity needs to be expressed and sustained in a common culture, a vocabulary, expressions, icons, points of reference, etc.

This common culture is very important to nourish the sense of belonging to the same family and to communicate through it the essential elements of our Lasallian identity. In the measure to which the make-up of our Lasallian Family is enriched with new groups coming from very diverse situations, it becomes that much more necessary to reinforce the common bond, facilitate the identification of the various members with the spiritual and cultural core of the family. We will be needing means of communication to help us to create and transmit that common culture.

But the Lasallian culture must continue to re-create itself and express itself in new paradigms. The way in which we interpret the Lasallian identity today is almost exclusively from the perspective of the Brother, and from the European and American context. Starting from now this reading of our identity should be enriched with new perspectives; there are interpretations now coming from the lay persons. It is urgent that what the feminine side brings (the lay woman and the woman religious) be listened to in order to underline many aspects of the Lasallian charism and identity which at this time we scarcely take into account.



## VI. Canonical implications and ecclesial recognition

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Is ecclesial recognition of the Lasallian Family possible (or even desirable)? And, in the case that it is, what sort of recognition do we want?

And what are the canonical implications that carry with them the burgeoning of the Lasallian Family?

Let us begin by noting these four general principles, selected from the Code of Canon Law:

- The faithful have the right to follow their own form of spiritual life, provided it is in accord with Church teaching (c. 214).
- The faithful may freely establish and direct associations which foster the Christian vocation in the world (c. 215).
- The faithful can live according to the spirit of a religious Institute, and they have the right to associate with one another for this purpose (c. 303).
- Institutes which have associations of the faithful joined to them are to have a special care that these associations are imbued with the genuine spirit of their family (c. 677).

Let us now try to specify the ecclesial and canonical recognition, first with regard to the whole of the Lasallian Family and then for the groups associated with it.

### 1. ECCLESIAL RECOGNITION OF THE LASALLIAN FAMILY.

The Code of Canon Law does not have a figure or model for the juridical recognition of the charismatic families because the publication of the Code happened when the new model of charismatic family hardly had begun to develop in the Church.

The canonical “figures” that can approximate the charismatic family are the “confederation of public associations” (c. 313), a juridical entity, the same as the “public association”, or the joint body of associations of the

faithful (like the Third Orders and similar fraternities) “placed under the overall direction” of a religious institute (canons 303 y 677.2).

But the figure that is modeling the charismatic family we are concerned with is quite distant from those canonical figures by two essential characteristics: complexity and the federative character (that is to say, non-hierarchical).

As an example of complexity, consider the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, that includes as groups officially recognized to the present, various religious congregations of canonical right and others of diocesan right, two secular institutes, three public and one private associations of the faithful, an ecclesial movement and two worldwide civil associations (former students).

The Lasallian Family, besides assuming that complexity, puts emphasis on the federative character in its style of constitution and organization, as a *communion of communities* united by fraternal bonds, without *a priori* hierarchy. This emphasis corresponds to the lay dimension that the Lasallian charism integrates in a prophetic manner.

The Lasallian Family, the same as any other charismatic family in the Church, does not need a formal canonical recognition and can set itself up as the groups associated agree among themselves, as long as the proper nature of each group is respected. Nevertheless, the question of whether some type of official recognition is desirable is still on the table, for example, to guarantee that the Lasallian charism be identified in the Church in its essential traits, or that the Lasallian Family be recognized as the authoritative body and guarantor of the Lasallian charism before the Church, or simply, to acquire juridical personality. If that is seen to be worthwhile, the representative organism of the Lasallian Family will have to seek the approbation of its *Statutes* or *Charter of Identity* of the Lasallian Family from the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and, simultaneously, from the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

## 2. THE ECCLESIAL RECOGNITION OF THE GROUPS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LASALLIAN FAMILY.

Here we are referring to the groups of lay persons, since the groups of men and women religious have their proper means to obtain recognition, first in the diocese and then by pontifical right (in this case through the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life).

## 2.1 “Indirect” ecclesial recognition.

A group of Lasallians can form a “private association of the faithful” without needing a formal canonical recognition (it is a right explicit in canon 215). As a proof of its Lasallian identity it is sufficient that it be recognized as a Lasallian group associated with any of the institutions that officially represent the Lasallian charism in the Church, or rather by the official representatives of the Lasallian Family where this is officially constituted.

On the part of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the recognition of an associated lay group can come through the General Chapter or the Superior General and his Council, in the universal sphere, and by the Brother Visitor and his Council at the level of its own district. In the spirit of the 43rd General Chapter, the frame of reference for all the experiences of association is the district, so that it seems logical that all recognition at the worldwide level ought to be passed first through the district recognition (of one or more districts).

The result of this kind of recognition is a “*private association of the faithful without legal status*” united with the Institute of the FSC or/and the Lasallian Family. This gives the possibility for internal organization without depending on authorization of the Church hierarchy, but at the same time limits it, in the sense of not being able to create and maintain establishments of Christian education or catechesis, but rather having to depend on another authorized institution, for example the Institute of the Brothers by means of the corresponding District or the bishop of their own diocese.

## 2.2 “Direct” ecclesial recognition.

The step towards canonical recognition presents three alternatives:

**1<sup>a</sup>. The simplest** is that of a simple direct formal recognition, which is obtained after the approbation of the *statutes* on the part of the *ecclesiastical authorities*<sup>2</sup>. This does not change the private nature of the association,

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<sup>2</sup> When we refer here to “ecclesiastical authorities” this is to be understood in the sense of canons 312 and 322 which indicate the competent authority for setting up public associations, for granting legal status and for approving the statutes:

1) The *Holy See*, for universal and international associations;

2) The *Episcopal Conference*, in its own territory, for national associations which by their very nature

nor add to it rights or duties (c.299). It continues to be a “*private association of the faithful with no legal status*”. In any case, the official recognition gives it a guarantee of ecclesiality.

**2<sup>a</sup>. The second alternative** is that of recognition as a *private association*, but with legal status (c.322.1). Just as in the previous alternative, the statutes have to be approved by the *ecclesiastical authorities* (c.312), which also issues the decree of constitution as having legal status.

In so far as it is a private association, this second alternative does not add more rights or duties. It will continue to be free to organize itself internally. But it will acquire the capacity to act as legal body by means of the representatives recognized in the statutes, and for the purposes specified in the latter (c. 114).

Nevertheless, even in this case, the association will not have the authority to found or direct by itself, works of Christian education or catechesis. If it wishes to have this faculty it will need the recognition which is described in the following alternative.

**3<sup>a</sup>. Public Association of the faithful** (c.301.3). By the same decree with which it is made into a public association it is also constituted as having legal status and receives the mission for working for the ends which the association proposes to achieve in the name of the Church (c.313), that is to say, for a Lasallian group, Christian education and catechesis.

Just as in the other two alternatives, it is the ecclesiastical authorities which approve the statutes and any changes which have to be made to them. But, in addition, in this case, it is also the ecclesiastical authorities who have to confirm the President elected by the Fraternity and to name an ecclesiastical assistant (c.317.1) who acts as representative of the Church.

The public association retains the ownership and administration of its goods, but has to give an account of its administration to the ecclesiastical

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establishment are intended for work throughout the whole nation;

3) *The diocesan Bishop*, each in his own territory. The written consent of the diocesan Bishop is required for the valid establishment of an association or branch of an association in the diocese, even though it is done in virtue of an apostolic privilege. Permission which is given by the diocesan Bishop for the foundation of a house of a religious institute is valid also for the establishment in the same house, or in a church attached to it, of an association which is proper to that institute.



authorities every year (c.319.1). From the economic point of view, recognition as a public association could have an advantage compared to recognition as a private association, where contracts and wages are concerned. The goods of public associations are ecclesiastical goods, and in many cases (depending on the country in question) will not be subject to the same obligations as civil associations.

Each alternative has advantages and disadvantages. The private association has more autonomy in its internal organization. The public association has more autonomy with a view to the accomplishment of its mission.

Some other aspect can tip the balance to one or the other side: in the case of the public associations there are certain restrictions that have to do with who can belong to them (c. 316.1), conditions that do not exist with regard to the private associations.

For each one of the three alternatives, recognition can be sought by diocesan organisms or from the Holy See, according to the geographical extension of the association. In the second case, the groups of lay persons direct their petition to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, specifying its membership in the Lasallian Family.



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