



**PASTORAL LETTER**

**Living Authentically  
IN CHRIST JESUS**

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Superior General

1 January 1994

**Living Authentically**  
**IN CHRIST JESUS**

*Father, through your Spirit, you gave to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators.*

*In your Providence you have transmitted that charism to us, charging us to live it, safeguard it, deepen it, and develop it.*

*United in mind and heart, we Brothers express to you our desire to live this gift of your Spirit faithfully, zealously, and creatively. We ask you to enliven us with holiness, awareness, sensitivity, creativity, and courage, similar to that which animated and characterized our Founder.*

*Father, shape and renew our Institute that it bear the image of Christ and show his likeness to the world.*

*We make these petitions, humbly but urgently, through, with, and in Christ Jesus, our Lord.*

*Amen.*

1 January 1994  
Feast of Mary, Mother of God  
*World Day of Peace*

Dear Brothers,

*“May the Lord who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being—spirit, soul, and body—free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 5:23-24)*

Several days ago I received a Christmas letter from a friend who made those words of Paul the heart of his greetings. While this passage has never before caught my attention, I find that it expresses very well the wish and prayer I have for every Brother of the Institute as we begin the year 1994: International Year of the Family, year of synods on Africa and on Consecrated Life, tercentenary of the first profession of perpetual vows and of other important events in our Institute.

That all blessings come from God—including that of peace and that of holiness—is a fundamental Pauline and Lasallian teaching. Our Founder teaches us that one of the effects which the spirit of faith produces is that of attributing everything to God, saying with Job, “The Lord has given me all, the Lord has taken all from me; blessed be the name of the Lord” (*Collection*, p. 34).

Because we have given ourselves to the Lord and to his service, we can be certain that God is offering us these blessings of peace and holiness. But because we are free, we can accept them or we can reject them.

The link which Paul establishes between peace and holiness corresponds, I think, to our personal experience. The more we strive to embrace the gift of our vocation and to live wholeheartedly the total and public consecration we have made to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the more we shall experience interior peace. This peace will in turn help us—as individuals, as communities, as Districts, as Institute—to live our consecration authentically and to “bear the image of Christ and show his likeness to the world.”

### **This pastoral letter**

Paul’s prayer is that God make the Thessalonians holy in every way and keep their entire being—spirit, soul, and body—free from every fault at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The theme of this pastoral letter is living authentically, **IN CHRIST JESUS**. It is, therefore, about being “holy in every way” and striving to keep our “whole being—spirit, soul, and body—free from every fault.”

This letter is about welcoming the Lord into our lives, the Lord who continues to “come,” the Lord who invites us to such intimacy with

him that we are able to say with Paul, “For me to live is Christ.... I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.” This letter is about welcoming into our lives the Lord who has charged us with the mission of making his loving and saving presence a visible and effective reality in the world of education and in the world of the young. This mission is at the heart of the charism of John Baptist de La Salle, the charism which has now become ours to live, safeguard, deepen and develop (*Mutual Relations*, 11).

In the spirit of these words, Brothers, I pray, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of God and Mother of our Institute, that 1994 be for you a year of happiness in your vocation, health of mind and body, and growth in holiness.

### **1993: a year of grace**

We begin the new year in gratitude for the blessings the Institute received in 1993: gratitude specifically for the General Chapter and for the beatification of the martyrs of Almeria: Brothers Aurelio Maria, Jose Cecilio, Edmigio, Amalio, Valerio Bernardo, Teodomiro Joaquin, and Evencio Ricardo.

No greater compliment can be paid to these men of extraordinary faith and zeal than that extended to them by Pope John Paul when he called them “Witnesses of Jesus Christ.” They—and all of our other martyred Brothers—freely

accepted what they considered to be an extraordinary grace, that of martyrdom. To paraphrase our Founder, they accepted with much patience the difficulties they had to suffer and were willing to be dishonored and mistreated, even to the point of giving their lives for Jesus in the fulfillment of their ministry (MTR, 9.1).

But, Brothers, most of you know that the joy of the beatification on 10 October was followed a few weeks later by shock and sadness. Four Brothers of our current community of Almeria were involved in an automobile accident. Brother Clodoaldo Revilla lost his life. The other three Brothers were seriously injured, but, thanks be to God, are recovering. To the family of Brother Clodoaldo—which includes his brother, Brother Saturnino Revilla, Auxiliary Visitor—and to the entire District of Andalucia, we express our sympathy and promise of prayers.

### **1994: International Year of the Family**

In declaring 1994 the Year of the Family, the United Nations gave a broad interpretation to the word “family.” The celebration is an invitation to us to reflect upon our Institute, as well as upon the entire Lasallian Family and upon our mission to promote and foster family life through human and Christian education. The first in a series of colloquiums to be organized in response to Proposition 2 of the General Chapter will have as its theme, the family.

You will receive information concerning this initiative in the near future.

Pope John Paul has taken the family as the focus of his *Message* on this World Day of Peace. His words are very pertinent to us as Christian educators, reminding us that we need to be familiar with the family situations of our young people and know how to respond to them with understanding, sensitivity, compassion, and encouragement. The *Message* reminds us also that we are obliged to help young people become more aware of and responsive to the thousands of families that are victims of the racial, ethnic, and nationalistic hatred and violence which tragically mark our society today.

### **Street children . . . and the Lasallian Family**

More specifically he reminds us of the street children, an almost unbelievable phenomenon of our day, a phenomenon to which responses are all too often characterized by callousness, indifference, and even cruelty. Is this phenomenon not the kind of situation which “seized” and “deeply moved” our Founder, propelling him into a response that would lead to the foundation of the Christian schools and of the Society of Brothers, as well as to a radical change in the direction of his own life?

Brothers, would not the creation of new and effective initiatives for children deprived of

a proper home and of family life be an appropriate way to mark this International Year of the Family? Can we not use our schools more creatively as centers for programs and educational activities that “reach out” to those in need? The impressive number of programs already in existence in our Lasallian world today is evidence of what can be done—and of what should be done in greater numbers.

### **Synods on Africa and on Consecrated Life**

Both of these synods are, of course, of great interest to our Lasallian Family and, more specifically, to the Institute. Our major priority in Africa today is that of fostering the growth of an Institute which is at the same time authentically Lasallian and authentically African, an Institute which will be at the service of African youth for generations to come. The Institute has made great financial sacrifices to provide for the solid formation and education of our Brothers.

But, needless to say, our focus is not only on the future. In the twenty African countries in which we serve, we are responding creatively and effectively to the educational needs of youth, poor youth particularly. We are proud of and grateful to the Region of Africa/Madagascar, which last September began its first regional missionary endeavor by establishing a community and school in Congo. This foundation follows that of Mozambique, established last year by the two Districts of Brazil.

The synod on Consecrated Life next October is, of course, a matter of great interest and concern to all members of religious institutes. Men and women religious, particularly through the Conferences of Major Superiors, have submitted numerous reactions and responses to the *Lineamenta*. The recent *Congress on Consecrated Life*, organized by the Union of Superiors General, in which eight Brothers of the Christian Schools participated, will, I think, have a positive impact on the work of the Synod. Later in this letter, I shall make some references to the statement of *Convictions and Proposals* produced by the Superiors General following the Congress. It is our hope that members of Institutes of Brothers will be well represented at the Synod as active consultants.

### **Tercentenary**

You are well aware that we have already observed and will continue to observe a number of “tercentenaries.” I think that the celebrations associated with the tercentenary of the “Heroic Vow” in 1991 had a significant impact throughout the Lasallian world.

The year 1694 was a particularly important year in the history of the Institute. The Brothers debated and approved an early version of the Rule. A number of them gathered with the Founder in an assembly which can be considered the first “General Chapter.” Twelve Broth-

ers and the Founder professed perpetual vows. The participants formally elected John Baptist de La Salle as Superior General (despite his protests), but at the same time adopted a statement proclaiming the intention of the Institute to remain exclusively lay and stating unambiguously that all future Superiors would be lay members of the Institute.

It is not my purpose at this time to reflect on these important events. Nevertheless, the conscious and totally free decision of the twelve Brothers and of the Founder to consecrate themselves to God as Brothers of the Christian Schools for all their lifetime can serve as a point of departure for the reflections which follow in this letter.

The biographers are clear that De La Salle did not pressure the Brothers to profess perpetual vows. On the contrary, he challenged them to understand fully the gravity of their decision and to make their determination in total freedom. Furthermore, he insisted that the *Rule* be presented to and accepted by the Brothers throughout the Institute. He wanted no misunderstanding, no confusion. It was his intention that those who opted for membership in the young Society understand the nature of the Brothers' vocation and be committed to live it authentically.

In my closing remarks to the General Chapter and in the videotaped interview which followed it, I expressed my conviction that the

most fundamental questions we face as an Institute today are these: "What kind of people are we? What do we stand for? What are our values?" The answers have to be formulated in the light of who we say we are, who we publicly claim to be. For this reason the Founder's desire that the Brothers have a clear understanding of the nature of their vocation, and of the obligations integral to it, is quite relevant.

The *Declaration* expresses the decision of our renewal Chapter to interpret the charism of John Baptist de La Salle in a dynamic rather than static or fundamentalist manner. Nevertheless, that same *Declaration* insists that there are specific constitutive dimensions that we must embrace and personally synthesize, if we want to consider ourselves Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The celebration of the tercentenary of the first profession of perpetual vows is an invitation to each of us 1) to reflect profoundly on the meaning of the charism which has been transmitted to us; 2) to renew our consecration on 29 May 1994—Trinity Sunday—**consciously and freely**, and 3) to set about the task of **CLOSING THE GAP** in order that we might live our charism more authentically **IN CHRIST JESUS**.

## I. CLOSING THE GAP

With the intention of expressing my thoughts in some kind of intelligible order, I decided to divide this letter into six chapters: **Closing the Gap, Charism, In Christ Jesus, Ambassadors and Ministers of Jesus Christ, Our Specific Role, and Community.**

But I have given considerable thought to the location of this particular chapter: **Closing the Gap.** I was somewhat inclined to follow what seems to me a logical order: 1) reflections on our charism in general, 2) reflections on each of the three major constitutive dimensions, 3) reflections on "conversion" or "closing the gap."

But then I remembered that Paul's conversion was not the result of orderly or methodical reflections. It resulted rather from an experience, a profound experience of Jesus that led him "to understand that he must start all over again and turn his whole life upside down" (Carlo Martini, *The Testimony of St. Paul*, p. 24).

I remembered that De La Salle was also led by God to turn his whole life upside down and to begin all over again. That radical change of direction was not the result of reasoning. Nor was it the result of any dramatic "Damascus Experience." It was the result of prolonged contact in a "new" world with people with whom he had had little prior experience. He was

"seized" and "deeply moved" by what he saw and felt. He recognized that God in his Providence was calling him to a radically different way of life. We can hardly imagine how this experience must have affected him intellectually and emotionally, or what it must have cost him to "let go" of his wealth and life style, enter the world of the poor, and associate himself with the Brothers.

### From "adapted renewal" to "closing the gap"

For these reasons I have decided to initiate these reflections with some thoughts I shared with the Visitors last June. The more I have thought about the General Chapter, the more convinced I have become that the major task that faces the Institute during the next seven years is that of **CLOSING THE GAP.** In 1987 I used the word "conversion" to express the same idea, and in 1992 "transformation." I am using "closing the gap" today because the expression was employed frequently during the General Chapter and has appeared in the pastoral letters of some Visitors, in the proceedings of several District Chapters, and in various publications.

The idea is certainly not new. The General Chapter of 1966-67 spoke of "adapted renewal;" that of 1976, "revitalization;" that of 1986, "conversion;" and that of 1993, "closing the gap." Those of us who are inclined to cynicism will find plenty of material there! But those

of us attuned realistically to the human condition and to the extraordinarily difficult itinerary of the Institute during the past 27 years will rejoice that we have in no way abandoned the struggle for the authentic renewal of the Institute.

I had the impression during the 42nd General Chapter that something was markedly different from the other two Chapters in which I participated. The capitulants seemed to be very sensitive to the hollowness of simply reaffirming the need for change. They sensed, for example, that it was not enough to reaffirm that our religious consecration establishes an intimate communion between the person of the Brother and that of Jesus Christ; or that our first apostolate is the witness of our consecrated life, which implies the authentic living of our responsibilities and obligations. The capitulants knew that it would not be enough to declare again that the distinctive character of our communities is to be a community of faith where the experience of God is shared, or to repeat that the community is for us our home.

The capitulants recognized that they had to do more than simply talk about "shared mission" or to state again that our "principal function" consists in the work of evangelization and catechesis. They knew that it would not be sufficient to declare the need of a plan that would contribute to making the direct service

of the poor our effective priority or to repeat what the *Rule* says twice: that we should consider transferring some of our apostolic activities and even entire works to others in order to respond to more urgent and important needs both at home and abroad.

### **The Institute does not act. . . WE act**

The capitulants to the 42nd General Chapter examined our lived experiences. They recognized the significant progress that has been made by the Institute in the process of renewal. At the same time, they acknowledged honestly that there is a sizeable **GAP** between the way we describe ourselves in the *Rule* and the way we really live. They acknowledged that there is a gap between the priorities which we say govern our lives and the priorities which in fact determine many of our decisions at every level.

Nevertheless, many of the interventions during the Chapter made me think that we have at last begun to interiorize, that is to say, to "swallow" and "digest," to make "our own," the descriptions we have written and reaffirmed in past Chapters. It occurred to me several times during the Chapter that the Institute seems more disposed than in the past to commit itself to the decisive and effective action that will be required if we want to narrow the gap significantly before the year 2000.



It was with that determination in mind that the General Chapter made an extraordinary number of requests to the Superior General and General Council. We have worked hard during the past seven and a half months to set in motion an ambitious and challenging seven-year plan. We shall do our best to help.

But, Brothers, let us be realistic. What the Superior General and General Council can do is limited. I said above that the "Institute" seems more disposed than ever to take the decisive and effective action we require. But in fact the "Institute" as such does not "act". It is "we" who act or fail to act: we—individual Brothers; we—members of communities; we—members of Districts, Sub-Districts, Delegations. Our progress as an Institute during the next seven years will depend on the decisions and actions that we take on the local level.

### **Let us begin with ourselves**

What all this means, Brothers, is that you and I have to be disposed to change whatever needs to be changed—and that we must begin with **ourselves**. Let us not play victim. Let us not blame others or simply "curse the darkness" for the problems we face. We need to take responsibility for our lives. We need to be disposed to turn our lives upside down, if necessary, and to start all over again. We must be disposed to turn around, if that is what is required, and move off in another direction.

To narrow the gap we have to be honest and resolved to live our commitments authentically. We chose to be Brothers—and to accept all the duties, responsibilities, and obligations implied in that choice. And we choose to remain—because we "know" that this life is "right" for us.

"Religious choose religious life because, in some deep way, they must. Like the artist who has to paint or the poet who has to write, religious have to do what they do, not because it makes sense but because life does not make sense for them on any other terms." (Sandra Schneider)

### **The Damascus experience**

I said earlier that Paul's life was not changed as a result of some kind of rational process. He had a profound experience of Jesus Christ, an experience that turned his life upside down, an experience that he never forgot. Whatever happened to him was so intense and so significant that he considered everything else as loss, as rubbish. "What he formerly thought important now seems negligible to him and holds no importance at all" (Martini, p. 14).

But it may seem that in my discussion of "closing the gap" I have placed the emphasis not on an experience with Christ, but on our own determined effort to change what needs to be changed in our lives as Brothers. I have in fact urged that we take responsibility for our

lives, that we not play “victims.” But none of that is incompatible with an insistence that the profound conversion and “new life” which we desire for the Institute requires the grace of God. Whenever we wrestle with the question of conversion, we encounter inevitably the mystery of grace and free will, and the “problem” of reconciling the two. I think that we need to take as our guide the words of Augustine: “We pray as if everything depends upon God and work as if everything depends on ourselves.”

Most of us will not have a “Damascus Experience.” Nor will our story parallel that of our Founder. Nevertheless, the Lord does and will act in our lives in a way that is no less real and no less significant. But how? When? In our daily prayer, in the Eucharist, during a retreat, in conversation with a friend or spiritual guide, while reading and meditating, while walking?.... Cardinal Martini says that the Lord will act at the moment he, in his Providence, has decided.

We, therefore, must be ready. Each of us must meet the Lord every day in personal prayer with the dispositions of one who longs, of one who searches, of one who honestly acknowledges his sins, of one who begs the Lord to transform him: “Behold I come to do your will, O God.... Lord, what will you have me do?.... Speak, Lord, your servant is listening....”

I hope that I am not presumptuous in suggesting that the moment we are living today—

the post-capitular period, the year of the synod on consecrated life, the tercentenary of the perpetual profession of our early Brothers—is indeed a Providential moment for a decision and commitment to act resolutely to narrow the gap. God’s grace is available to us. Let us ask the God who gives us peace to make us holy in every way and to keep our whole being—spirit, soul, and body—free from every fault (I Thess. 5:23-24).

## II. CHARISM

In their statement entitled “*Convictions and Proposals*,” the Superiors General remind us that “consecrated life,” or more specifically “religious life,” is one particular way of living baptismal consecration in communion with other vocations in the Church. This way of life has a number of constitutive “nuclei;” for example: the radical following of Christ, consecration to God, public profession of the evangelical counsels, a life of prayer, common life, various forms of service....

While these “nuclei” are generally present in particular religious institutes, they are not present in the same way. There is a striking variety of forms of religious life in the Church today. The Superiors General suggest that the theological category most capable of making sense out of this variety of forms is that of “charism.”

Founders have received from the Spirit a particular charism which they transmit to their disciples. This charism implies a specific mode of being, together with a specific mission, spirituality, and style of fraternal life. The charism is a gift for the service of the Church and of the world. It is a “dynamic impulse” in that it is in constant development. It is confided to the particular Institute to be lived, interpreted, made productive, and manifested in communion with the Church in different cultural contexts.

### “Charism” in Church documents

This use of the word “charism” in reference to religious life has a short history in the Church. While the expression was employed in a number of interventions during the sessions of Vatican II, the conciliar documents do not use the word in reference to religious life as such. The first Vatican document to use the word “charism” in relation to religious institutes was Paul VI’s *On the Renewal of Religious Life*, published in 1971 (*Evangelica Testificatio*, 11). Seven years later the document entitled *Mutual Relations* provided a “working definition” of “charism:”

“There are many Religious Institutes in the Church, each differing one from the other according to its proper character. Each, however, contributes its own vocation as a gift raised up by the Spirit.... The very charism of the Founders appears as an

experience of the Spirit, transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth.” (MR 11, 1978)

### Charism in the Lasallian tradition

It is, needless to say, not surprising that De La Salle did not employ the word “charism.” It is absent from the *Lasallian Vocabulary* and for that reason is not one of the topics treated in the recently published volume entitled *Lasallian Themes*. How interesting, therefore, that the documents of our renewal Chapter of 1966-67 use the word frequently. While the expression is never defined or even explained explicitly, its use seems perfectly consistent with the position just quoted.

We find in the *Declaration* and in consecutive versions of the *Rule* such expressions as *charism of their Founder, living charism of the Founder, fidelity to his charism, charism proper to the Institute, living fidelity to the charism proper to the Institute, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators....* The Congregation for Religious, in its Decree formally approving our *Rule*, recognized the new texts as a *faithful expression of the charism of St. John Baptist de La Salle and of the tradition of the Institute*. Finally, in his remarks to the capitulants, John Paul II spoke of the *Lasallian charism*.

## The Founder and charism

But if the Founder did not use the word “charism,” he nevertheless described the Brother’s vocation **AS IF** he knew the word and all that it implies. In the ninth *Meditation for the Time of Retreat*, for example, he reminds the Brothers that in the Church there are “different gifts, different ministries, and that to each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good, that is, the good of the Church.”

De La Salle tells the Brothers that their vocation is “a great gift of God.” All the “nuclei” that constitute religious life are found in the Brothers’ vocation. Several are given specific and concrete expression in this paragraph from the same meditation:

“...look upon yourselves as ministers of God, acting with love, with true zeal ... willing to give your lives for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry ... it is God who has called you, who has chosen you for this ministry, and who has sent you to work in his vineyard. Fulfill your ministry, then, with all the affection of your heart, working entirely for him.”

## Living fidelity to the charism of the Founder

Every time I return to the *Declaration*—which is very often—I marvel all the more at its richness. The guidelines provided for “fidelity to

the Founder” are remarkable. We are told that

“...fidelity to the specific intentions of the Founder and to the tradition of the Institute is confided to us as living men. It is we who carry on the task of discovering how fidelity to his charism can be lived in the present time.” (7)

But that search, according to the *Declaration*, is not given to us as individuals. Fidelity to the Founder is entrusted to the Institute, that is to say, to the community of men who constitute it.

“The General Chapter, above all, is the occasion when the Institute as a body, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can see itself and declare to itself what it really is.” (7)

In sections 12 and 13, the *Declaration* defines the dimensions “that constitute the Brother’s vocation, apart from which he could not be considered a member of the Institute:” baptism, public profession of vows, lay status of the Institute, apostolic community life, educational mission with the school as the privileged means, ministry of the Word of God, special preference for the poor....

“God calls each Brother to make a personal response to the constitutive dimensions of this vocation as received from the Founder, and to adapt his response to the signs of the times which are manifest in the needs of the world today.” (*Declaration*, 14.3)

## **Integration of the constitutive dimensions**

Each Brother, therefore, is called to integrate in a personal synthesis—that is to say, to make one, to bring into unity in his personal life—the various constitutive dimensions. In the ongoing process of interiorization and integration, he establishes his “Lasallian identity.” This notion of “integration” is developed in depth in sections 16 through 27 of the *Declaration*. Our most recent General Chapter reminds us of the importance of “integrating all dimensions of our lives—our consecration, our apostolic work, our community life, our prayer life—around our faith in Jesus Christ as disciples united in brotherhood.”

Very often we organize the various constitutive dimensions into three categories: consecration, mission, community. Grouping the various dimensions in this way can be helpful, but can also be misleading. Quite often, unfortunately, the categories are identified with concrete activities: consecration with religious exercises; mission with apostolic activity; community with the times we are literally together. Integration then is perceived as the juxtaposition of all of these activities. Arguments break out about which is more important: consecration or mission? or mission or community? This understanding of “integration” is false and harmful.

Integration properly understood means that the dimensions have become one. We can “dis-

tinguish” them, but we cannot “visualize” them. They cannot be identified with specific activities. We are consecrated men twenty-four hours a day, apostolic men twenty-four hours a day, community men twenty-four hours a day. We pray as apostles. We minister as consecrated men. And we are always BROTHERS:

“This is why the personal life of a religious must not become dichotomized between the generic end of religious life and the specific end of the institute; between consecration to God and mission in the world; nor between religious life in itself on the one hand, and apostolic activities on the other.

“There is no religious life existing concretely ‘by itself’ upon which is grafted the specific end and the particular charism of each institute as subordinate additions. In institutes dedicated to the apostolate, there is no pursuit of sanctity, profession of the evangelical counsels, or life dedicated to God and to his service which is not intrinsically connected with the service of the Church and of the world.” (*Directives on Formation*, Congregation for Consecrated Life, 1990, pp. 18-19)

## **Our charism: blessing and challenge**

We Brothers of the Christian Schools are truly blessed: the charism which John Baptist de La Salle received from the Holy Spirit for the service of the Church and of the world is

generally clear and unambiguous. Furthermore, to help us interpret that charism for our day, we have received wise orientations and directives from the last four General Chapters. But we all know that learning to live, safeguard, deepen, and develop that charism authentically has been and will continue to be a major challenge.

In 1986 we reached a decisive moment in our long process of discerning what fidelity to the Founder means today. We expressed the fruit of our discernment in our new *Rule*, and the Holy See recognized that *Rule* as a “faithful expression” of De La Salle’s charism. “Decisive moment,” however, certainly does not mean “final moment.” The Brothers—the “living men”—of future generations will have to “carry on the task of discovering how fidelity to his charism can be lived in the present time.”

But as the 42nd General Chapter clearly reveals, we have at this particular moment of our history a strong consensus on how fidelity to the charism of John Baptist de La Salle can be lived today. We have expressed who we believe God wants us to be, what we believe God wants us to do, and how we believe God wants us to do it.

But the challenge and task we face is to live that charism, safeguard it, deepen it, and develop it. Everything in this letter is related to the first of these responsibilities, but I want to comment briefly on the other three.

## **Safeguarding our charism**

We have to safeguard our charism—a charism which is not always understood or appreciated by bishops, priests, other religious, or conferences and associations of religious. Some do not understand why we are all lay. Others are not convinced of the importance of Catholic education, particularly in schools. There are religious themselves who downplay the notion of specific charisms and promote the notion of “religious life in general.” We have to be prepared to respond and to defend with conviction and pride our specific mode of being, mission, and spirituality:

“There is no uniform way for observing the evangelical counsels, but each institute should define its own way.... This is true not only with regard to the observance of the counsels, but with respect to all that concerns the style of life of its members.” (*Directives*, p.18)

At the same time, however, we have to be open to criticism. It can happen—and does happen—that criticisms are directed not at our charism in itself, but at some lived manifestations of that charism, manifestations that perhaps are in fact questionable.

## **Deepening our understanding**

We have to deepen our understanding of our charism. This letter is the work of one

person. It is pastoral in nature and is certainly not intended to be a scholarly treatment of charism in general or of the charism of John Baptist de La Salle in particular. We need such studies, however. Indeed, we need to maintain our support for our outstanding program of Lasallian Studies. In addition we have to continue to organize ongoing formation programs for ourselves and for our partners. We must intensify our efforts to make available the biographies and writings of the Founder in the many languages in use in the Institute and to prepare and publish materials that are of practical use for our young men in formation and for our partners.

### **Developing our charism**

Finally, we have to develop our charism. The Institute has insisted that, on the one hand, there are specific dimensions that constitute our vocation, "apart from which a Brother could not be considered a member of the Institute;" and that, on the other hand, "we"—Brothers living and working in eighty-one very different countries—must discover how fidelity to the charism of the Founder can be lived in such a multiplicity and diversity of situations.

"Every Lasallian foundation is embodied (incarnated), together with the local Church, in the culture, the language, and the life-style of the place where it is located. Such embodiment ought to be accomplished in

keeping with the charism proper to the Institute." (*Rule*, 18a)

The following remarks of Pope John Paul II to the more than five hundred participants of the *Congress on Consecrated Life* last November are very pertinent:

"It is necessary to remember that religious charisms are special gifts of the Spirit for the People of God... The founders were able to incarnate the Gospel message in their time with courage and holiness. Faithful to the inspiration of the Spirit, their spiritual children must continue this witness in time, imitating its creativity with a mature fidelity to the original charism, constantly alert to the needs of the present moment."

## **III. IN CHRIST JESUS**

### **Through religious institutes the Church manifests Christ**

*Lumen Gentium* says that through the varied forms of religious institutes the Church manifests Christ

"...to believers and unbelievers alike: Christ in contemplation on the mountain, or proclaiming the kingdom of God to the multitudes, or healing the sick and maimed and converting sinners to a good life, or blessing children and doing good to all men,

always in obedience to the will of the Father who sent him.” (LG 46)

This magnificent passage is an invitation to us Brothers of the Christian Schools to reflect on the charism transmitted to us from John Baptist de La Salle and to ask ourselves how we are called by God to manifest Jesus Christ to believers and unbelievers alike. Our Founder’s response to the question I have posed is unambiguous:

“Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your teaching as if he were teaching them.” (MTR 3.2)

“Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make his Spirit come alive in you, since he has chosen you to do his work.... Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd seeking the lost sheep ... since you are taking his place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same thing.” (MTR 4.1)

God has chosen and called us, Brothers, to take the place of Jesus the Good Shepherd and to do his work. It is our vocation to represent Jesus Christ himself. It is no distortion of the Founder’s thought to say that it is our vocation to re-present Jesus Christ, to make him present again: “He wants your disciples to

see him in you and receive your teaching as if he were teaching them.”

### **Our charism**

Our charism in the Church is to make the loving and saving presence of Jesus Christ a visible and effective reality in the world of education, in the world of the young. That, Brothers, is what we mean when we say that our spirituality is apostolic. Through us the Church manifests Jesus Christ to believers and unbelievers alike.

“God, in Jesus Christ, must be made manifest through us.... Religious will evangelize to the degree that, through their lives and their being, they again make present in the world, faithfully and radically, Jesus Christ himself.” (M. Azevedo, *Vocation for Mission*, pp. 8, 14, 138)

### **For me to live is Christ**

To live our charism authentically, enthusiastically, and effectively, we must “dispose our hearts” to receive the Christ who “wishes to come into our heart, in order to make us sharers in his nature” (Med. for Christmas Eve) and enable us to say with Paul, “I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me ... for me to live is Christ.”

In choosing the words **IN CHRIST JESUS** for the title of this letter, I am well aware that the expression is less concrete than “following



Christ” or “in union with Christ.” But I chose the more “mystical” expression because we need to be confronted with the mystery which is at the heart of our vocation as Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Christ is for us the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He reveals to us by his life and teaching what being human is all about; he reveals to us by his life and teaching who God is and what he is like. But Christ is also the **LIFE**. He sends his Spirit upon us, enabling us to radiate his presence to “believers and non-believers” among the young people his Father confides to our care. Our Founder urges us to ask Jesus Christ earnestly that our teaching be energized by his Spirit and draw all its power from him (MTR 3.3).

Brothers, our religious vocation makes sense only if Christ is truly the center of our life. For this reason we have to be men of prayer. We have to be in regular and frequent “contact” with the Lord. We have to give time to periods of “heightened awareness” of his presence, of his love for us, of his call to us to make his presence a reality for the young. We need to express to him our **YES**, thank him for all his blessings, ask his pardon for our failures, and ask him for the help we require.

And, of course, we must devote time to reading and meditating the Scriptures, to spiritual reading, to theological study. Our daily Eucharist provides us the opportunity to re-

new, in union with Christ—priest and victim—our total consecration to the Trinity and our unconditional commitment to live wholeheartedly this specific way of living baptismal consecration.

#### **IV. AMBASSADORS AND MINISTERS OF JESUS CHRIST**

An essential, constitutive dimension of that “specific way” of living baptismal consecration—that is to say, of the “charism” of John Baptist de La Salle—is that of committing ourselves as ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ to the human and Christian education of young people, especially poor young people:

“This mission of the Institute is an apostolate: it is directed towards the eventual salvation of the world. In their work of education the Brothers have as their goal the realization of that transformation of the world which was begun by the Incarnation and the Paschal mystery of Our Lord.” (*Declaration*, 37)

“It is true to say that the Brother exercises an apostolate whenever he truly educates. It is apostolic to awaken in students a serious attitude towards life; ...it is apostolic to make it possible for them ... to experience the autonomy of personal thought; it is apostolic to help the students to use their liberty to overcome their own prejudices,

preconceived ideas, social pressures; ...it is apostolic to dispose students to use their intelligence and their training in the service of others, ...to teach them how to listen and to try to understand, to trust and to love; it is apostolic to instill in students a sense of trustworthiness, brotherhood and sisterhood, and justice. The teaching of the Council encourages the Brother to find God's work in whatever he does for the advancement of civilization and culture." (*Decl.*, 41)

I have quoted these long passages because I believe they merit a new publication (despite the fact that their point of departure is the model of "Brothers' school"). They affirm not only that education is truly an apostolate, but what is even more pertinent in this particular letter, that commitment to the human and Christian education of youth, poor youth especially, is a constitutive dimension of our vocation.

### **"Be faithful to the charism of your Founder"**

My impression—perhaps I am mistaken—is that human and Christian education has not been given sufficient attention in Institute Chapters and publications during the past twenty-five years. As paradoxical as this assertion may seem, it is my impression that the apostolate of education is not perceived or at least experienced by all of us as a constitutive dimension of the charism of John Baptist de La Salle.

Certainly we have throughout the Lasallian world outstanding educational institutions; certainly we are in fact helping many thousands of young people year after year realize their potential as human persons. About that I have no doubt. My concern is that our generous and enthusiastic commitment to education is not always as "integrated" with religious consecration as it should be. As a consequence, the activities to which we devote most of our day do not always nourish our consecrated life to the extent that they can and should.

My concern is also that some of us manifest an inadequate appreciation for the role of the Brothers as teachers and for our work in schools. I am convinced that we Brothers of the Christian Schools and all those associated with us in our Lasallian educational mission—a force of perhaps 50,000 men and women—can exercise and should exercise far more leadership in Catholic education at international, national, and local levels.

These remarks of Pope John Paul to the capitulants are quite pertinent:

"Your mission is important and difficult; you must accomplish it at a time of considerable change in society. Be faithful to the charism of your Founder. Entirely given to the Lord, consecrate yourselves without respite to the Christian education of youth. May that remain the essential characteristic of your work. ...in all circumstances be

teachers, witnesses to Christ, Christian educators, by your word and example.”

### **Education and the 42nd General Chapter**

Because of the concerns I have just shared with you, I am personally very happy that the 42nd General Chapter provided us with valuable reflections on various aspects of education and made a number of creative recommendations and decisions. They may be found in *Circular 435*. You are already well aware that the Chapter profited immensely from the dynamic and constructive participation of the lay consultants and strongly affirmed and clarified the notion of “shared mission.” My focus now, however, is on other significant orientations and decisions of the Chapter. Most pertinent is the following affirmation:

“As members of the Institute of St. John Baptist de La Salle, we strongly re-affirm our option for the human and Christian education of young people and adults, and in particular for the poor.”

“We collectively repeat today the commitment of our Founder who ‘was deeply moved by the way in which the children of the artisans and the poor were abandoned and left to themselves’ and discovered in faith the mission of his Institute....” (*Circular 435*, pp. 20, 22)

The pages which follow these quotations are very rich and merit discussion in community, as well as in our schools and other educational centers.

You will recall that the Chapter charged the Superior General and Council to name a group of experts in the field of education. The purpose of this group is 1) to identify educational problems which call for a clear position on the part of the Institute; and 2) through interdisciplinary, intercultural, and interreligious collaboration and dialogue, to constitute documentation for the use of the Superior and General Council, as well as for the 43rd General Chapter. Thanks to the help of a very competent and creative *ad hoc* committee, we have set in motion a series of colloquiums, about which you will be informed in the near future.

### **Our principal function**

Our *Rule*, faithful to the Founder and to our living tradition, asserts that the “principal function” of the Brothers is the work of evangelization and catechesis (15). The *Declaration*, which maintains that the Brothers are “catechists by vocation,” states that while catechesis has always occupied the central place in the apostolate of the Brothers, the teaching of religion has never been dissociated from the rest of education. There has always been an effort to unite the work of evangelization with growth in education and culture (40).

It is clear, therefore, that the teaching of religion and pastoral activity—in the context of human and Christian education—are a constitutive dimension of our vocation. But, as we all know, it is not easy to “live authentically” this dimension of the Lasallian charism.

We work today in an extraordinary variety of educational institutions and in a wide diversity of what the Pope has called “situations” (*Redemptoris Missio*). We have—often in the same school—youth who are “living” their Catholic faith and those who are not; youth who are Christians but not Catholic; youth who are non-Christian; youth who are indifferent or even hostile towards all “organized” religions.

I think that in view of this complexity we Brothers and our partners need more ongoing formation in religious education, as well as in the areas of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. With regard to the latter, it is my impression that the official positions of the Holy See are far more “advanced” than the positions held by many of us!

### **The Christian school**

While we acknowledge this “complexity of situations,” we nevertheless have to ask ourselves seriously if we are giving sufficient priority to the creation of schools that correspond, as far as possible, to the school described in article 3 of the *Rule*.

We must always bear in mind that the *Rule* does not say that any “school” whatsoever is the “privileged instrument” of our apostolic activity. It says explicitly that the privileged instrument is the **CHRISTIAN** School—a school which is a sign of the Kingdom and a means of salvation, a school which is constantly being renewed, a school which is accessible to the poor.

The *Rule* also states clearly that the Institute is open to other possibilities for teaching and education more adapted to the needs of time and place—but these educational centers or new forms of “schools” should also be **CHRISTIAN**, that is to say, “signs of the Kingdom and means of salvation.”

We have to ask ourselves also if we are giving sufficient priority to the quality and frequency of courses in religion for our Catholic pupils; to the professional qualifications of the teachers of religion and pastoral ministers; to well-planned opportunities for prayer, Eucharist, Sacrament of Reconciliation, retreats, youth groups; to counselling and spiritual direction; to courses and activities designed to inform and sensitize our young people to the social teachings of the Church...

### **Education of the poor: constitutive dimension**

John Paul II has declared repeatedly that “the Church is called to be on the side of those

who are poor and oppressed in any way.... I therefore exhort religious institutes to carry out a sincere review of their lives regarding their solidarity with the poor" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 60). That particular exhortation was addressed to all religious institutes, but it has special relevancy for us, men called in a particular way to identification with the poor and to solidarity with them.

The **human and Christian education of the poor** is a constitutive dimension of our vocation. I am using that expression deliberately rather than the expression "service of the poor." I think that it is more exact and more precise. I have the impression that the "language" some of us employ fosters dichotomy: education on the one hand, and service of the poor on the other hand; or of schools for the education of young people on the one hand, and of non-school apostolates for the poor on the other hand. This tendency towards "dissociation" or "disintegration" is unfortunate. The explanation of our vow of association for the educational service of the poor is clear:

"By the vow ... the Brothers commit themselves, as the Founder did, to conduct schools or other centers of Christian education that are accessible to the poor." (*Rule*, 39)

Our goal, therefore, is to make available to the poor the kind of human and Christian education which we have just considered. Attentive to the needs of the poor and determined

to respond to them effectively, "the Institute establishes, renews, and diversifies its works" (*Rule* 11). In other words, we create the "means" required. Furthermore, Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations are to establish a plan which will make the human and Christian education of the poor more and more their effective priority (40a).

I suppose that the most arresting decision of the General Chapter is Proposition 1: to make available 100 Brothers (over and above those who would be made available normally) and a certain number of our partners 1) to create new apostolates for the poor, 2) to renew or strengthen existing educational apostolates for the poor, and 3) to train Brothers and Lasallian partners, particularly in small and developing sectors. You have recently received a communication concerning this project. I hope your response and that of your District will be creative and generous.

But perhaps even more important than the final decision was the quality of the debate which preceded it. I had the impression during that public discussion that at last we are prepared to take seriously our claim that the education of the poor is our priority and to act accordingly. I am hopeful, therefore, that in the next few years, we shall witness significant decisions for new, well-planned communities and educational ventures for the poor.

During the past fifteen years, Superiors and General Councillors have urged District Chapters to initiate at least one such program at every Chapter. But to that suggestion I would like to add another: that every existing school “reach out” to the poor around it and respond creatively: literacy programs—in the school or in other centers; teams of volunteer teachers and young people to work with street children; night classes for school drop-outs; Lasallian youth groups to respond to the needs of the sick, the aged, the neglected....

### **Our missionary commitment**

One of the most inspiring and encouraging developments in the Lasallian Family in recent years is the number of Brothers (including Brothers legally retired), as well as lay men, women, and young people, who have responded to the call of the Church and Institute for service in areas of the world with urgent need for assistance in providing human and Christian education for their people. I cannot help but think of these beautiful words of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

“Thanks to their consecration they are eminently willing and free to leave everything and to go and proclaim the Gospel even to the ends of the earth.... Often they are found at the outposts of the mission, and they take the greatest risks for their health

and their very lives. Truly the Church owes them much.” (69)

Some of us have asked whether or not missionary activity is a constitutive dimension of our vocation. The Institute is not, of course, primarily or exclusively missionary. Nevertheless, it has been established for the education of youth who are deprived of educators and evangelizers. That “first intention” has to be translated today into a generous missionary impetus. Vatican II, recent Popes, and numerous documents of the Holy See have encouraged religious institutes to hand over to others certain of their works or activities in order to meet more urgent demands (*Declaration*, 24; *Rule*, 19a).

The General Chapter has charged the Superior General and General Council with the responsibility of articulating, after dialogue with the Regions and Districts, the missionary policy of the Institute. The need for such an articulation is evident and urgent. We shall do our best. In the meantime, however, we encourage reflection and discussion on this topic at all levels. Above all, we encourage Brothers to offer themselves for educational service in needy areas of the world—and we urge Regions and Districts to maintain and even increase their support of missionary sectors of the Institute.

## V. OUR SPECIFIC ROLE

In the report entitled “Theology of Shared Mission”—a report accepted globally but not voted section by section—the Chapter recognizes shared mission as a manifestation of the work of the Spirit and declares that “it constitutes an integral part of our vocation as religious lay persons.” That is a very significant statement. It means that we now consider “shared mission” as a constitutive dimension of our vocation (*Circular 435*, p. 43).

### Our key role

For this reason we can say, in accord with the *Message to the Brothers*, that looking upon ourselves as the “authorized agents” of our mission is obsolete, and that while there is “one mission, there is a diversity of vocations.” Our “key role” is to be the “primary witnesses” of the spirit and charism of the Founder (pp. 8-9). The *Message to the Lasallian Family* reminds us that we Brothers must “make visible the call to live the gospel in depth” and that we must be “readily available” for the educational service of the poor (p. 15).

The Chapter did not develop these few but pertinent comments concerning our role. Rather than enlarge upon these assertions, the capitulants limited themselves to declaring that “the Spirit invites us to a deeper and richer understanding of who we are and what we are called

to do” (p. 43). We—Brothers of the Institute today—have to discern what that “deeper and richer understanding” actually means in the context of our lived experience.

It is clear that we evangelize first and foremost by being who we are supposed to be. As public followers of Christ, we witness to his presence in the world of education: “The first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life” (*Rule*, 24).

But to insist on the primacy of witness or the primacy of “being” over “doing” is not to say that the choice of what we do or the particular service we render is unimportant. On the contrary. What we do is obviously extremely important. We do not “witness” in the abstract. We witness as we act. What we choose to do, for whom we do it, with whom we do it, how we do it, why we do it—all these factors influence the quality of our witness.

### What distinguishes us . . .

Nevertheless, it is not the specific work that **distinguishes** us from our lay partners. As I said in my pastoral letter three years ago, after we remove from consideration those ministries which are reserved to the ordained clergy, there is no ministry that is specific to and limited to members of religious institutes. We Brothers have to acknowledge that there is no educational service that is reserved to us.

Lay men and women are today functioning with success as headmasters, councillors, teachers, catechists, youth ministers.... In many Catholic schools today—including a number of our own—there are no members of religious institutes as permanent staff members. As far as the quality of the work is concerned, what is important is competence and dedication, not vocation to the married life, single life, priesthood, or consecrated life.

And yet I “sense” that some of us are in fact searching for and hoping to discover our distinctive role in some particular “area,” the leadership of which, if not the service itself, is “reserved” to us. The area might be the major posts of authority in the school, the direction of the religion department, the head of the pastoral ministry team.... One of the areas mentioned most frequently by Brothers is the “animation” of the laity. All of these positions reflect an understanding that members of religious institutes, because they are religious, are somehow more qualified and competent than our lay partners.

What then is our distinctive role? It is to make Christ’s loving and saving presence a visible and effective reality in the world of education and in the world of the young. Claretian theologian Jose Garcia Paredes suggests that religious are signs of the Kingdom in the way that parables and miracles are signs in the Gospels: “parables” in that they inspire and communicate meaning; “miracles” in that they

effect change and transformation through services rendered. In his address to the General Chapter last April, Garcia Paredes said that the verbs which characterize the mission of members of religious institutes

“...are not so much verbs of instrumentality (to do, to educate, to cure) as symbolic verbs (to mean, to inspire, to allude, to manifest, to stimulate, to transcend). To have a symbolic function in the setting of education is a fascinating task. It is relatively easy for those who have received the charism.” (*Bulletin*, July 1993, p. 37)

### **What ministries are most appropriate?**

But if we agree that our distinctive contribution springs more from who we are, what we believe in, and what we stand for, than from the specific service we render, what ministries are most appropriate for the Brothers today? I think that, in principle, any work associated with education or school is appropriate. We are faithful to our charism when we witness to the Lord’s presence in the school or educational center. In practice, however, I recommend that priority be given to activities which enable us to send “significant messages” and which permit direct, frequent, and personal contact with the students.

I think, for example, that a Brother occupying the post of headmaster can send a power-



ful message to students, teachers, and parents. The message is that we Brothers—because we love our pupils and want to provide them with the best opportunity possible to develop their potential—dedicate ourselves to the creation of a Christian School that manifests the characteristics of Lasallian education. But the headmaster has to be visible—in regular and personal contact with pupils, teachers, and parents—and not “buried” in his office.

In my opinion Brothers teaching mathematics, science, literature, history, etc., are “affirming values that are genuinely human, while challenging the human to go beyond itself”—which is a major goal of Catholic education. By our very life style we demonstrate to our young people that there is more to life than the human person can see by his own reason (*U.S.A. Regional Chapter*, 1968, p. 15).

But, of course, our “principal function” is the work of evangelization and catechesis. Some of our Brothers are engaged full-time in the teaching of religion or in pastoral activity. Their service is certainly very “significant.” At the same time, I think there is great “meaning” and, therefore, “witness value,” in combining the teaching of “secular” subjects with the teaching of religion and pastoral activity. When young people see that the teacher they admire as an excellent professor of mathematics is a man who believes so firmly in God that he has

become a “professional Christian,” they receive a powerful message. But, of course, for that “message” to be transmitted, the Brother has to share his faith in some visible and unambiguous manner. The title “Brother” or even the religious habit is in no way sufficient.

### **The messages we send**

But there is still another consideration. Let me present it by sharing a frequent experience when I meet classes or groups of young people during my visits. Almost invariably they ask why the Brothers, who say their mission is “especially” to the poor, are not in greater evidence among the poor and do not manifest more active concern for social justice. The youngsters may be poorly informed or misinformed. Regardless, it is clear that we send “messages”—whether we intend to or not. The question is, are the messages we send those which God is calling us to transmit?

Finally, let me caution against becoming too self-conscious about “bearing witness” and “sending messages.” Brother Cornelius Luke, former Visitor General, used to say, “Let your light shine, but don’t shine it.” Good advice! What is important, it seems to me, is to live authentically—and let “bearing witness” take care of itself.

## VI. COMMUNITY

The formula which the Founder and the early Brothers used to express their consecration to God—a formula which is the basis of the one we use today—reveals clearly the centrality of **community** in our life as Brothers.

In the first paragraph of the formula, we make public and explicit our baptismal consecration, committing ourselves to procure God's glory as far as we shall be able and as he will require of us. In the second paragraph we express the specific way we believe God wants us to live that consecration. We promise to unite ourselves and to remain in society with the Brothers, men "associated" for the purpose of conducting together schools for the poor. We then make explicit our commitment to be an active and collaborative member of the Institute by promising to be available to serve wherever we may be sent and to do whatever we may be assigned.

### Our union as Brothers

It is impossible to speak of any particular aspect of our life as Brothers without reference to the profound union, togetherness, association, interdependence, and solidarity which characterize our international religious family. The capitulants to the 42nd General Chapter marvelled that despite differences of culture, language, experiences, hopes, and points of view,

"we achieved a remarkable union of minds and hearts on substantial matters" (p. 12).

Nevertheless, it is evident from his meditations and personal letters that our Founder appreciated the enormous challenge of living in community. We all know that challenge from personal experience—but a similar challenge is present in married life and wherever and whenever people strive to form community.

The theme of this pastoral letter is living our charism authentically—in Christ Jesus. Because community is at the heart of our vocation, we need to reflect on our lived experience of community life in the light of Institute orientations.

### Consecrated men in apostolic communities

We have made a free decision to live our baptismal consecration as Brothers of the Christian Schools and, consequently, to live as members of apostolic communities. In these communities we live as men who have made public profession of our faith and of our will to follow Jesus Christ, making the full, radical, and coherent living of his Gospel the primary objective of our life (Azevedo, pp. 8-9). As well-educated and professional men, living our Christian faith freely and enthusiastically, we can send powerful and life-giving messages to our students, teachers, parents, and friends.

But, of course, the quality of that prophetic witness depends on the authenticity with which

we live our life of prayer, Eucharist, fraternity, and zeal, as well as on the genuineness of our life of freely chosen celibate chastity and simplicity of life. Furthermore, our communities have to be visible, open, and hospitable.

### **Our community is for us our home**

In a number of other pastoral letters, I have offered reflections on community as our “home.” It is the “core” community of our life; it is where we feel we “belong” and are accepted and affirmed. But, of course, communities like that do not just “happen.” They have to be constructed by men committed to “being brothers” to one another.

During these months of ethnic and racial violence in so many areas of the world, I have thought often of our communities, so often constituted by Brothers of various ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds. I thank God that in general we are living together well. We have the opportunity, Brothers, to witness to all with whom we come in contact that whatever differences exist among people, we are children of the same God, and are therefore brothers and sisters, who can and must learn to live together.

Article 53 of our *Rule* reminds us that we are called to be brothers among ourselves, brothers to the adults with whom we are in contact, and older brothers to the young people

confided to our care. Let us not allow our communities to become islands. Let us be good neighbors, active members of the civic community, devoted members of the local Church.

### **Apostolic communities**

I have already written at length about our mission. But it is important to emphasize that the community as community is apostolic. Whether we are all engaged in the same apostolic activity or whether some or all of us are exercising diverse ministries, we can maintain a sense of working “together and by association” by sharing with one another our apostolic experiences and by supporting and encouraging one another. In this way we shall perceive ourselves—and we shall be perceived—as apostolic communities. In the process of living together as consecrated apostolic religious men, we shall communicate the Good News of the Gospel to those with whom we are in contact.

### **Union . . . a precious gem**

No comment of the Founder makes more evident his conviction that authentic community life is central to our life than this passage from his meditation for December 30:

“Union in community is truly a precious gem.... When it is lost, all is lost.”

## CONCLUDING PRAYER

**CONVINCED** that "the world has more need than ever, even at the very center of humanity's temporal pursuits, for a witness given by people who are consecrated and who know and love God as a living being;"

**CONVINCED** that "it is more necessary than ever that an international Institute exist for the educational service of people throughout the world" (*Declaration*, 11);

**CONVINCED** that if by our very lives we "give testimony to the presence of God, to the liberating force of his Spirit, and to the tenderness of his love," our pastoral ministry of vocations will become an effective invitation to share the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (*Rule*, 85);

### WE PRAY:

*Father, through your Spirit, you gave to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators.*

*In your Providence you have transmitted that charism to us, charging us to live it, safeguard it, deepen it, and develop it.*

*United in mind and heart, we Brothers express to you our desire to live this gift of your Spirit faithfully, zealously, and creatively. We ask you to enliven us with holiness, awareness, sensitivity, creativity, and courage, similar to that which animated and characterized our Founder.*

*Father, shape and renew our Institute that it bear the image of Christ and show his likeness to the world.*

*We make these petitions, humbly but urgently, through, with, and in Christ Jesus, our Lord.*

*Amen.*

Fraternally in De La Salle,



Brother John Johnston, FSC  
Superior General