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The Latin American
Lasallian Region
Educational Project –
PERLA

Foreword

The acronym P.E.R.L.A. stands for Lasallian Regional Education Project for Latin America. It so happens that in Spanish there exists a word with the same letters 'perla' which is normally associated with jewelry. Perhaps unconsciously, when PERLA - that is the project in question - is referred to in both written and spoken Spanish, the feminine form of the definite article 'la' is generally used. And we are dealing with a pearl, a jewel, a project which will be talked about a lot and will be a point of reference for many years to come.

Starting out from the context, from reality, appears obvious but is not always evident. The reader of this booklet will admit after reading the first part - which deals with the contextualization or the background - that on few occasions will he have come across such a deep, global, detailed and documented analysis, ahead of any plan. Far from remaining overwhelmed or defenseless in the face of a reality which seems condemned to not being able to pick itself up, the people who forged this project (they themselves tell us that it is more a dream than a project), displaying a prophetic ardour, committing themselves and committing thousands of Lasallians, "from the bottom to the top and from the top to the bottom", have laid the foundations for the Lasallians' charism to continue to be more alive than ever.

There follows an extensive second part, as necessary as the first, in which means of dealing with the most urgent educational needs of Latin America are studied, meditated upon and proposed. These urgent needs are rather like hospital emergencies since they require quick, precise, accurate intervention, since after a diagnosis like the initial one, the seconds lost could be disastrous. Throughout this part what impresses more than the identification of needs are the means used to deal with them, since a project has of necessity to be practical. Combining democratization of knowledge, access to new technologies, respect for the environment and human rights within the framework of the omnipresent "quality", must be the means for responding efficaciously to such needs.

In the rest of the booklet the plan is made concrete. I have no intention here of unveiling it, or even of pointing out its elements. The reader, after his calm immersion in the reading, will be thankful that he was not conditioned or made predisposed to a kind of prior interpretation, much less having it pointed out in advance where the treasure is to be found.

If, for whatever reasons, you cannot get round to reading the booklet, or you cannot finish it, you will still need to know some of the great values of this formidable adventure:

- the target is and always will be the poor,
- we are dealing with an instrument which responds to the demands of the present Association,
- it implies a personal and community commitment,
- it animates and welcomes the culture of “islands of creativity”,
- it presupposes a collaboration and an interdependence of all the Districts of Latin America,
- it is a plan which is always being enriched since it is always open,
- it is aimed equally at all levels of education.

The personal benefit from the booklet is increased by numerous contributions, often in the form of quotations coming from the Lasallian, Church, literary and political worlds.

These will doubtless be an added incentive to a well-deserved reading of this booklet.

Br. Alfonso Novillo.

Latin America and the Caribbean, the stage for PERLA



"From town to town and from city to city, we were witnesses of the most extreme poverty: towns made of black mud, on black land, with children covered with sludge; men and women with faces burned by cold, where tears have been frozen for centuries, to the point that you cannot tell if they are made of salt or of stone... Music from serenaders who describe the terrible, timeless, godless, sunless solitude without corn. Only mud and wind."

Oswaldo Guayasamín.

Latin America, a multicultural textile...

The conquest of indigenous peoples was one of the fundamental events of the previous millennium and there are those who want to rewrite it at the dawn of the new millennium. It turns out that there was not just one history, but many histories; not just one culture, but many.

Latin America is diverse. This enormous diversity should be seen more as a treasure than as a problem or difficulty. This has not always been the case in history since the original peoples have been discriminated against and excluded from access to the fruits of goods and social services and, in addition, they have been denied the right to live in the framework of the principles that come from their own culture.

More than 500 years of Eucharist and scarcity... more than 500 years of exclusion.

The future of Latin America and the Caribbean depends in large measure on the establishment of justice, fairness, and on new inter-cultural relationships that will ensure respect for differences. But none of these requirements will spring up by spontaneous generation. They must be constructed.

"I have the right to equality when difference is internalized within myself. But I have the right to difference when equality does not characterize me." This sentence from Boaventura Sousa de Santos wisely expresses the path that will include the new inter-cultural relationships in the Region.

"I do not want my house to be walled in on all four sides, nor to have my veins blocked off. I want cultures from all lands to circulate around my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be pulled down by any one of them." Gandhi.

Latin America and the Caribbean in the New Context of Globalization.

"Latin America is the Region of open veins. From the discovery to our own days, everything has undergone transmutation to European capital, or later to North American capital, and as such it has been accumulated and it accumulates in far away centers of

power. Everything: the earth, its fruits and its richness in minerals, men, and their capacity for work and for consumption, natural resources and human resources. The method of production and class structure in each place have been determined, successively, from the outside, by their incorporation into the universal mechanism of capitalism.” Eduardo Galeano.

In the second half of the decade of the 1980s, profound processes of transformation were taking place at the world level:

- Changes in the prevailing economy: a fuel crisis, the fall of the dollar and of North American productivity, the beginning of the emergence of the European block, the reorientation of financial policies, from the capitalism of the welfare state to the neoliberal free market.
- The fall of the socialist block headed by the Soviet Union, which caused many to question the unipolar world and even the “false” death of ideologies.

In recent years, Latin America and the Caribbean have confronted a group of clearly neoliberal changes that began at the end of the decade of the 1980s, as well as the unparalleled debt crisis and structural problems rooted in their history.

In a new context of a worldwide economy and the phenomenon of globalization, negative growth and the stagnation of productivity have been frustrating during the last two decades - only three countries achieved equal or higher averages in those areas in comparison with the three previous decades and with the debt crisis. At the same time the instability of financial growth and the successive financial crises demonstrated the accentuation of some of its causes and affected even more the unequal distribution of income and resources that characterize the region, which overall shows long-term deterioration, as part of a trend which is apparently a global one.

Globalization has, on the one hand, a contradictory and ambivalent character that appears as a threat and a promise, no doubt, opening important fields for social and political action. Up until now, harsh reality shows us that the threat has materialized and no date for the completion of the promise has been set.

As part of such a process, we are also seeing the emergence of a new transnational social plot in which domestic and internation-

al dynamics on global topics are found and demands that are part of a new order that is appearing.

Latin America, an impoverished continent...

After almost two decades of policies of structural adjustment and stabilization, from the empire of the so-called Washington Consensus, it is clear that the situation in the region continues to be dramatic. In many cases the situation has deteriorated, as can be seen by the following indicators:

- The rate of growth for the regional GDP (gross domestic product) fell over the course of the last three years according to CEPAL (Financial Commission for Latin America) and is well below 2.7% annually, the amount necessary to reduce by 50% the number of persons who live on one dollar per day.
- The level of unemployment increased in the 1990s, reaching 10.7% in the region in 2004.
- If households in poverty fell by 2% during the past decade, Latin America and the Caribbean have 174 million poor people and 78 million who are classified as extremely poor.¹ There were 40 million and 20 million more, respectively, than in the decade of the 1980s.

Latin America has become impoverished by gigantic steps.

A Region with Problems of Employment...

The growth of the informal urban area, now common knowledge since we know that one third of the working population of the region is self-employed - three times as many as the countries of the OECD - has transformed this area in recent years into the primary generator of jobs. For example, it is said that in Peru between 1995 and 1997, 800,000 jobs were created as opposed to 500,000 that were produced by the formal sector. This situation

¹ Here the most conservative estimates are used. These come from the World Bank. CEPAL speaks about 240 million who are poor and about 90 million who are destitute; there are various reports that would place this figure at 300 million. For further information, see Wodon Quentin T. (editor), *Poverty and Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean*, World Bank draft, February 15, 2000.

is quite serious, because as has been demonstrated both by CEPAL and by OIT (International Labor Organization), in the long term, informality is a generator of poverty, because among other reasons, it is concentrated in areas of low productivity.

Emigration for financial reasons is seen as an alternative to job seeking. On the average, nine Hondurans each hour emigrate to the United States in search of better living conditions. Countries such as Ecuador, Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua exist practically due to family remittances, which has acted as a shock-absorbing mattress for the crisis. According to official statistics, in Guatemala alone, in 2003, family remittances accounted for 7.8 million dollars per day - much more than what was produced by coffee sales or by tourism.

“The poor, the really poor, are those who have no time to waste. The poor, the really poor, are those who have no silence, nor can they buy it.

The poor, the really poor, are those who have legs that have forgotten how to walk, as the wings of chickens have forgotten how to fly.

The poor, the really poor, are those who eat garbage and who pay for it as if it were food.

The poor, the really poor, are those who have the right to breathe filth, as if it were air, without paying anything for it.

The poor, the really poor, are those who have no more freedom than the freedom to choose between one or another television channel.

The poor, the really poor, are those who live passionate dramas with machines.

The poor, the really poor, are those who are always many, and who are always alone.

The poor, the really poor, are those who do not know that they are poor.” Eduardo Galeano.

The most unequal region on the planet².

It is striking that, although the GDP of the majority of countries in the Latin American region has been growing little by little, espe-

² Cf. Carlos Gómez, 2003.

cially in the decade of the 1990s (after the negative growth of the decade of the 1980s, known as the “lost decade,” the Gini index³, which measures the degree of goods distribution, in other words the equality or inequality within a society, indicates those societies that are more unequal). That is to say, the GDP has grown and along with it, the excluding, generative policies of injustice and inequality. It reaffirms, therefore, what for their part the Catholic Bishops affirmed in Puebla: *“Our countries produce rich people who become ever richer at the cost of poor people who become ever poorer.”*

Growth of the GDP without improvement in the Gini index would mean that there is greater wealth on the continent but that wealth is concentrated in fewer hands and there is unequal distribution. Even though the situation is similar across the world, even in northern or developed countries, in the south the situation is becoming extremely difficult, in view of the number of persons who live below the level of absolute poverty, which in Latin American and the Caribbean has reached an average of 50 per cent.

In one sense, we could say that the globalization of the economy, so praised and defended by neo-liberals, has only managed to globalize poverty but in no way has it brought about eagerly awaited progress and just distribution of wealth. This promise was defended zealously when the first measures of a free market economy were implemented. Indiscriminate privatization and even rejection on the part of the state to subsidize the very poor have created a new social category: the excluded.

Inequality in the distribution of income, in itself the greatest on the planet, has increased even more; measured by the Gini rate, it went from 0.54 in 1986 to 0.57 in 1997 and it continues to increase.

This phenomenon reminds us that the fundamental problem of the region is not poverty but inequality and exclusion which are products of misguided policies and from a position of dependence that the region occupies - and has for centuries - on the world scale.

³ The Gini index is on a scale from 0 to 1. A society with an index of 0 is totally egalitarian, that is to say, with homogeneous distribution of goods. A society with an index of 1, means that it is totally unequal. Obviously, no nation has an index of 0 or 1, but one that approached 1 would mean a nation that had greater incidence of injustice, and one that approached 0 would mean a nation that had more levels of equality.

Even in economies that have a greater rate of growth - such as Chile which appears as the paradigmatic model - inequality has gone from 0.44 to 0.58 in the period mentioned above.⁴

The elevated levels of poverty in the region and the increase of inequality make systems of political election more and more precarious and empty of content, giving further proof of the debilitation of the model for development and integration of globalization encouraged by multilateral agreements.

If it is true that some moderate advances have been made in the correction of fiscal inequality, in lowering inflation and in the acceleration of the growth of exports as evidenced by a study of the period mentioned, the overall perspective of the region has not improved. It is more and more clear that the cost of these relative gains in macro-indicators falls on the shoulders of the weakest and most vulnerable areas in the region.

As has been recorded in a recent report of the UNPD (United Nations Program for Development), at the same time there seems to have strengthened electoral democracy (periodic and free elections, political freedom, freedom of expression and its spreading relative to democratic systems), and poverty (43.9% of the regional population with income below the poverty level) and the highest incidence of inequality on the planet (0.552 on the Gini scale). The region is framed, then, within a decidedly sinister triangle.

Paradoxically, then, the enormous technological advance that humanity is experiencing and access to new and abundant resources in our region, rather than an opportunity for equity, solidarity, and justice, could become a greater sentence for exclusion and exploitation for the vast majority of our population and a factor that drives even deeper the already deep erosion of the very bases of poor social unity that exists in the region.

⁴ It is clear today for many economists that one cannot put forward economic development as a condition to reduce poverty. This is due to the fact that there does not exist a financial theory of distribution, which is the combined effect of financial strategies and public policy aimed especially towards that end. Not all growth generates the distribution of wealth; variables that have a bearing on this relationship are also of a political nature. For further information on this matter, see Fleury, Sonia: *Política social, exclusión y equidad en América Latina en los 90*, in Nueva Sociedad, No. 156, Caracas, July-August 1998.

This leads, unfortunately, to the fact that each day there will be a greater number of male and female citizens who question the value of the democratic model and associate it with greater poverty, greater corruption, greater demagoguery and injustice. Even the number of persons who yearn for the years of military rule and authoritarian power is growing.

The so-called Latin American "democracy" is edging towards a North American model, which consists of the possibility of choosing between the right and the extreme right.

Some are more equal than others...

Inequality can be shown by the following facts:

In rural areas, which have the greatest concentration of poor persons, they are routinely excluded from owning land, from obtaining technical assistance, from access to just markets, and from obtaining credit. In Ecuador, 1.6% of the ranches in the mountains occupy 42.9% of the land; in El Salvador, 87% of the farmers occupy 25% of farmland whereas 3% of the landowners control 44% of the land, and this shows a trend that the World Bank itself affirms throughout the Region.

Conditions of exploitation and exclusion are not only continuing but are also getting worse. Along with these financial and working conditions - which are jointly understood as problems - social discrimination is being maintained (gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic level), as well as the absence of space for individual and collective expression and creation and a growing devaluation of local culture as it comes into contact with the phenomenon of globalization. Exclusion in the Region assumes the negation of its citizens, which is really more political than financial, and which is expressed by not belonging to a political party, or to a rightist community.⁵

⁵ As Santos recalls in a very sharp text, while inequality is a socio-economic phenomenon and Marx was a great theorist, exclusion is a cultural and social phenomenon of civilization. While the system of inequality paradoxically is consolidated in the essential character of equality, the system of exclusion is done within a system of differences. See Santos, Boaventura da Sousa: *A Contrução multicultural da igualdade e da diferenca*, VII Brazilian Congress on Sociology, Rio de Janeiro, 1995.

On the other hand, in Latin American and the Caribbean, persons with disabilities account for 11.6% of the population, according to UNICEF, and 12.7%, according to IBD (International Bank for Development). Unemployment affects more than 98% of persons with disabilities, with consistent deterioration for living conditions of the entire family. Only 0.07% of the population of persons with disabilities of school age are cared for by the educational system. Some 99.03% are still to be discovered!

Persons with disabilities, by their very nature, require constant health care. Nevertheless, they are excluded from the system, which in general does not allow for the necessary specialized sub-systems. This is an “invisible” area and, in general, it is absent in public policies. Area organizations, both for persons with disabilities as well as for those who care for them, are severely weakened.

Nations in Crisis...

Notwithstanding the growth of poverty and the explosive social reality from which most people in Latin America suffer, electoral democracy has been consolidated in the different countries as the only possible way to choose governments. This, per se, is translated as an advance, given the dictatorial regimes that led to free elections in most nations.

The transition to democracy has not been an easy process to go through. In fact, today we might say that democracy is threatened by its inability to solve the great problems of the region.

Transition opened the way to populist governments, and after this to neoliberal governments; as has been the case of Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. However, the populist neoliberal binomial has not been easy to balance or even to overcome.

The despair of the majorities and the weakness of the parties to channel the protests and popular desires have been a fertile field for populist, tyrannical and even messianic proposals nourished by the many promises to a desperate people that, at the same time, create a new frustration of unsuspected consequences. This may seem, to a certain degree, the case of Venezuela. Or it can also be seen in experiences with proposals that were presented as social at the time, which soon gave way to the entrance of run-away neoliberalism as in the case of Peru.

Regarding Latin American States, the historical features that marked the relationship of the State and Society that explain the structural crisis of the former, - patrimonialism, authoritarianism, clientage, and exclusion - got worse due to globalization and, it still remains this way. The privatization of public lands, denial of citizenship, democracies lacking intensity and quality, and the fragility of our sovereignty - due to our dependence on financial capital and multilateral companies - gave as a result a State in "permanent crisis"⁶ and a constant weakening of the social ethics, together with the problems that all this entails, such as a growing index of corruption, insecurity and violence. Despite the fact that some regions have made an attempt to find their own way to social and sovereignty transformation, general conditions of the Latin American Continent are completely unfavorable.

On the other hand, social politics have become a fundamental tool for governments and international organisms in the struggle against poverty, having, a priori, very clear limits in defining the market as the fundamental economic level in the region.

The last elections on the Latin American Continent show a certain tendency to the left; toward governments with more of a social sense like those in Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. However, contradictions of globalization, the dependant subordination to the US and the real power of the elites in these countries do not foretell the achievement of authentic democracy in the short term.

Even electoral democracy has been questioned by the current reality. As an effect from this, the population has lost faith and trust in political parties and their representatives. The abuse of demagogy, the failure to keep promises, the corruption and drug trafficking entrenchment in the States and the worsening of the situation have led millions to question the value of politics and politicians. In general, politicians and their parties are taken as scoundrels and because of this environment, there are even those in the population, who pushed to their limits with frustration, vote for those who "steal, but work too".

⁶ The concept belongs to Heinz Sonntag. See, *Hacia una teoría del capitalismo periférico*; in Sonntag, Heinz and H. Valecillos: *El Estado en el capitalismo contemporáneo*, Siglo XXI editores, Mexico 1977.

A civil society not fully articulated.

On the other hand, changes are taking effect in the regional society: the transition from societies structured around clearly defined productive sectors to societies organized around very diluted processes; from articulated interests around classic alignments to representative forms less defined and micro social. However, even when they increased their expressiveness and diversity, and therefore, their capacity to foster a deep cultural change partially weakened their force to transform the State and its economy.

According to Carlos Franco, the result of such a situation is that the State, as well as civil society, has turned into systems of residual social integration, deepening the separation between social and economic policies, where more and more the social is dependent on the economic. This takes place despite not only the political importance, but also in terms of the expense incurred by social investment funds, among other instruments, which were created to confront the politics of adjustment and stabilization.

So close to the United States and so far from God.

“American power declared in a loud voice its intentions to rule the world by force. The Empire expressed that there wouldn’t be tolerance towards any competition, not now nor in the future. Its doctrine is not new, but never before has it been declared in such an open and arrogant way”.

The recent invasion of Iraq, shows how the *“masters of the world enforce their laws and make unilateral decisions according to their warrior calling on behalf of the name of God and democracy”*, said Galeano.

The Free Trade Agreements and North American foreign policies move forward into the region establish their domain and stand in the way of integration efforts. However, to a certain degree, the hegemonic North American power has withdrawn before socialists governments and/or those not submissive to the Empire. Cuba, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela and Panama are examples of this loss of control. The effect has been such that, for

the first time in history, the United States wasn't able to impose its influence on the selection of the General Secretary of the OAS.

Simultaneously, the European attempt to form a block capable of sustaining its role in politics and the world economy, the surprising Japanese failure to keep pace, the complex transition of former socialist countries; and the emergence of China and India make up an even more complex scenario than the previous one.

The "Free Market" has penetrated into the region, and as a side effect, a greater subordination of our States and markets, increasing exclusion, while the relative blocking of the regional integration processes (Mercosur, Comunidad Andina y Comunidad Centroamericana de Naciones), is an increasing limitation towards our globalization link.

In the very same way, despite some slow advances, the virtual blocking of the regional integration processes limits our globalization link even more. President Chavez from Venezuela has raised the Bolivarian Alternative Proposal for the Americas (ALBA/DAWN), as a new exchange scheme, which surpasses, by far, the mercantile vision of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and endeavors to mark new directions and globalize other values in the region.

An increasingly marginal region for international cooperation.

Despite the existence of wide historical and cultural bonds between Europe and Latin America, Latin America indeed is relatively marginal to the geopolitical priorities of Europe, its commercial interchange and the final destination of its investments. The EU grants privileged status to closer geographical regions, with greater risk towards world stability or more promising relations economically speaking. In the area of cooperation, the European Community has given priority to other zones such as Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. In the 21st century, in spite of the fact that there are significant processes that keep us connected and, even find their roots in the origins of relationships, such as Social Forum of the Americas, it is clear that terms that marked our relations have changed and need to be redefined. The context as well as the shared history demands it.

The next Latin American agenda.

Given the circumstances, it is clear that next Latin American agenda starts by reconsidering development strategies and by proposing a different vision that understands that development, rather than an effect of economic growth, is the result of the expansion of the peoples' capacities and freedom. Capacities and freedom that allow access to distinct opportunities and seek honest articulation among governability, competitiveness and social integration.

In this context, it is understood that the National State is necessary, although not sufficient, to establish the mechanisms required to avoid the destructive effects of globalization and encourage individuals to turn into active citizens of society, who by using both old and new social organizations and movements, can participate in political formulation and decisions, which controlling the State as well as the market. Obviously, the perspective towards regional integration is even more necessary and urgent.

The challenge of a new model of development and democracy.

The recent crisis in Argentina proves, without a doubt, the exhaustion of the development and globalization integration model supported by multilateralism; likewise, the profound political crisis, the limitations of civil society and sectors and the popular movements become obvious. This crisis was another expression of a convulsed continent struggling between an insertion of subordinated globalization or the possibility of its own project, which sends out fragmented and contradictory signs of symbolic rather than real resistance, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico, to the difficult situation in Colombia, which was used by the United States as an excuse to extend their "holy war" against drug trafficking and terrorism, increasing their power on the region at the same time.

The Latin American Continent faces the great challenge to subordinatedly join globalization under the worst conditions or, to develop a project of their own which understands **development** more as a result of the expansion of people's capacities and liberties to access different opportunities and fully exercise their human rights from an integral perspective, than as an economic

growth effect; which understands democracy more as a daily basis participation and representation exercise, as well as the full validity of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights that answer values such as equality, solidarity and non-discrimination, than as an electoral and procedural exercise; which understands, finally, that citizenship is the basis of democracy, therefore it is evaluated for its capacity to guarantee and expand it to the civil, social, political and economic spheres.

The new model of development and democracy is sustained on five fundamental values: ethics, solidarity, social justice, gender equality and transparency.

Based on these concepts, the following commitments must be assumed:

- Understand development from a human development focus that establishes people as the center of this aim. Acquire a commitment to the eradication of misery, poverty and discrimination, and therefore, struggle against inequality and exclusion, as well as unrestricted affirmation of human rights.
Development that must be ecologically, economically, socially and culturally sustainable constitutes an ethical imperative that must seek equality, and be understood as the possibility that society as a whole enjoy its benefits. Obviously, development expects change and a permanent capacity to observe and analyze the social dynamic.
- Defend and support pluralism, autonomy and participation as essential conditions to guarantee popular sovereignty, maintaining the defense and promotion of peace.
- Assure that cooperation follows the principles of sovereignty, independence and reciprocity, increasing relationships of solidarity of South - South, South - North and North - South.
- Give priority to the people's democratic participation in a public scenario, the struggle against factual powers and the development and strengthening the democratic sectors of local civil societies as part of the citizenship construction process.

As a result, Latin America and the Caribbean must answer at least six great challenges:

- *Declared equality of the individual*, which entails fighting against every form of discrimination and exclusion, no matter the character of its nature: politics, gender, race, religion, sexual preference, age...
- *Democratization of democracy*, which increases the incorporation of all the people, especially the new social actors and supporting the redefinition of the old ones, as a way to achieve a State in which all of society is fully incorporated into its decisions.

It is necessary to deepen the relationship between globalization, sovereignty and citizenship in a disputed context about the meaning of citizenship and the emergence of global civil societies.

- *Socialization of politics* in order to achieve a region with citizens, both male and female, capable of performing legitimate political functions and full participation in the public sphere, putting an end to its privatization.
- *Politicalization of society* as a way to throw off the character and origin of poverty and regain control over public goods.

All this entails going from the fight against poverty and to the recovery of the integral development theme, avoiding “being trapped” by antipoverty speeches. It is not poverty itself that must be attacked, but the causes which generate it. Since the end of the last decade, it was stated that poverty was not a temporary, but a permanent state in our countries. The current economic poverty policies do not generate temporary poverty; instead, they reproduce and spread the existing ones. That is the reason why a constant transfer of resources to the poor is necessary. In other words, poverty is seen as a political problem instead of a technical challenge to human development and the quality of life for all individuals. As a result of social exclusion, we have structural inequality and underdevelopment.

It also entails the struggle for the cancellation of the external debt, which is part of the new international financial architecture and the distribution of world commerce.

And finally it entails the defense of multilateralism as the basis of a new international order, which recognizes the importance of

multilateral treaties and organizations as the desirable environment for the agreements of development in its different dimensions. Events such as the multiple invasions by United States in Latin America establish the importance of the subject.

In the same way, the main object is to jointly push for the Breton Woods reform of institutions under the system of the United Nations, using the principle of one member, one vote, assuring the recognition of asymmetries in development procedures and the establishment of measures to find a balance, especially in the commerce and international financial system, as formal commitments on the amounts and contents of aid to development, putting an end to forms of aid that are tied up and conditioned.

It is important to point out the role that the European Union might perform by being a counterweight to the decisive influence that the United States exerts on Latin America. Not only in economic integration procedures and security and drug trafficking focus, but also as regards the formulation of social models that may inspire international cooperation. In relation to the United States, Europe shows a development that has been able to achieve an articulated market economy with more consolidated mechanisms of equality and respect for citizen and labor rights.

- Distribute our resources and increase the distribution as a way to face the inequality and unevenness that characterize us today.

Economic, social and cultural rights must be seen as an extension of human rights.

- Affirm the integration of regional citizenship by the generating solidarity; in other words, to subordinate the market in relation to the creation and exercise of rights.

Regional integration procedures cannot be limited to markets and enterprises as a strategy for the integration of plural societies, of the construction of shared identities and minimally shared visions.

Last words of hope...

According to Eduardo Galeano, regarding “the situation of Latin America, there are two options, either you are indignant or unworthy”, this is to say how could we not be indignant when

faced with a system that denies our children job opportunities, liberty and fulfillment...?

Even though we are held hostage by a system of power that gives to us with one hand, what was taken from us with the other hand?

“Despite everything, we Latin Americans have not been able to correct our mania for day dreaming and crashing into everything around us, and a certain tendency to unexplainable resurrection.”
Gabriel García Márquez.

In Latin America, the educational proposal of Paulo Freire coincides with different currents of the Theology of Liberation and an important dynamic of social movements, which encouraged self-management of the alienated, and the promotion of community projects to effect better living conditions. Priorities were oriented towards popular education to develop organization and mobilization capacities and productive projects in the incipient logic of popular economy.

“About the uncertainty of reality, no matter how screwed up it is, new fibers are growing and those fibers are made of lots of different shades of colors. Alternative and social movements are not only expressed through parties and unions: it is a means, but it is not the only one. This process is nothing special, it is used mainly on a local basis, however, and new forces are emerging throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. These forces spring up from the bottom to the top and from the inside to the outside. Without making a lot of fuss, they are standing for the refounding of democracy, nourished by popular participation, and recovering from the battered traditions of tolerance, mutual help and communion with nature. Manfred Max-Neef, one of its spokesmen, defines them as a swarm of mosquitoes, launched to attack the system that denies them a hug and forces them to strike out. Even more powerful than the rhinoceros, he stated, is the swarm of mosquitoes. They grow and grow, buzz and buzz.”

“In Latin America, they are a dangerous species in expansion: organizations of landless, roofless, unemployed people, those without; groups working for human rights; the white handkerchiefs of mothers and grandmothers, enemies of the impunity of power; group movements including people of the neighborhood; citizen fronts fighting for fair prices and wholesome products;

those who fight against racial and sexual discrimination, against male chauvinism and child exploitation; ecologists; pacifists; health promoters and popular educators; those who trigger collective creations and those who rescue them from collective memories; cooperatives practicing organic agriculture; communitarian television and radios; and many other voices from popular participation, which are not spare wheels of parties, nor chapels submitted to the Vatican. Often, the energies of these civil societies suffer from the harassment of power, fought sometimes with bullets. Some militants fall riddled on the way. May gods and demons cover them with glory: they are trees that bear fruit, those who suffer from being hit with stones.” García Márquez.

Latin America prides itself on having a rich history of creative searches, novel social organization, learning spaces, reflection and interchange of participative experiences among civil society groups, which have allowed, on occasion in spite of the dominion and control of the powerful- it to define the dreams and hopes of a life of honor, solidarity and respect for the diversity of others.

All this baggage of knowledge and wisdom constitute, together with its rich and varied ancestral culture, a suitable space to reedit and create forms of organization and social mobilization that can give rise to love, tenderness, and comprehension among peoples, towards a life of dignity with no exclusions whatsoever.

2

Educational urgencies in the Lasallian Latin American reflection



"Our Institute was born at the border of dehumanization: a young world apart from salvation, with no possibilities to reach neither human nor Christian fulfillment. Being loyal to our charisma for us means to answer with creativity to the new shapes of dehumanization, to the new poverty and to the calls from those who belong to the world of the excluded."

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría

“One of the things I admire the most about our Founder is to realize how attentive he was and how caught up in the reality in which he lived. In the light of this reality, and enlightened by God’s word, he was able to discover God’s plan for him and for the Institute.” Brother Álvaro Rodríguez, Mexico, May 2003.

Following the example of De La Salle, Latin American Lasallian reflection starts from the premise that it is necessary to give new importance to the presence and participation of the Institute of Christian Brothers Schools in the historical evolution and the efforts to overcome the conditions of injustice and dehumanizing poverty, which affects most of the Latin American population. It is especially necessary, due to the fact that it gravely affects children and young people, and therefore, destabilizes the possible future of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Attentive to the Latin American Continent’s needs and “trapped” by this reality, we Lasallians wish to offer creative and bold answers from our charisma to the needs of the poor and excluded of the continent and those called educational urgencies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Some of the educational urgencies that have been defined are:

1. The democratization of knowledge.
2. Access to new information and communication technologies.
3. Quality education.
4. Education in and from the promotion of sustainable human development.
5. Education in and from the respect for human rights.

The following is a brief description of each one of the educational urgencies and answers to these urgencies in the Lasallian reflection of the continent, expressed by most Latin American educational communities⁷ and the reflection of the Regional Educational Mission Team.

2.1 Democratization of knowledge.

In Latin America, millions of people are alienated from the access

⁷ Consulted on the special occasion of PERLA launch.

to knowledge. They are excluded from the opportunities to grow and develop integrally. They are excluded from the shelter that Lasallian schools may represent for these people. That is why democratization of knowledge is urgent.

In a broader sense and more rigorous definition, democratization of knowledge⁸ can be understood as the transfer or dissemination of scientific knowledge to the lay public. This is not the concept adopted on the continent by Lasallians, given that we consider that democratization is not simply increasing the access or the number of receptors of a given message, nor do we consider scientific knowledge as the only form of knowledge about nature or society.

Primary education has grown to a point in which most of the total percentage of the urban zones is covered; however, a huge coverage deficit still remains for the remaining school years. Furthermore, it is relevant to question the quality of the services. Coverage and quality problems are a constant argument in the continent: service expansion for majorities with a low quality or high quality excluding the majorities. We have not been able to find a balance. On the other hand, extremely rich enclaves coexist with overwhelming poverty zones in our countries.

This is the reason why Human Development indexes must be read in the context and in the light of human groups that the market has displaced from the center to the outskirts of the cities or plunged into exclusion. Democratization of the continent is only possible through democratization of knowledge, and this has as its basis quality education for the poor in such a way that they don't get excluded, but integrated under equal conditions with the rest of society.

However, school access is not solved only with focused educational policies; this is to say, attending only the poorest or only women. This problem can only be solved with direct and integral interventions of the structural conditions that generate and reproduce poverty.

It has been proved that the most common reason not to send children, both girls and boys, to school is poverty. And it has also

⁸ Cf. La BVS and democratization of knowledge and health information. Alberto Pellegrini Filho, Conference, OPS, 1999.

been shown that the deregulation of education costs - direct and indirect - is a trigger for school registration.

But it is one thing to get children to attend school and another thing to keep children in school so they can learn how to live better. In order to stop the vicious circle of poverty, what is needed is not only an "improved education", but the best education. Not only democratization of learning, but also greater reforms: not only doors inside of schools, but in society too.

Education by itself will not transform society, however, if education does not change, society will not change either.

The concept of equity, based on the World Bank point of view, has substituted what was previously the concept of equality of opportunities and rights. Lasallians affirm that equality - from the point of view of rights and educational opportunities - should at least entail:

- a) **Availability** (enough budget, the necessary schools and teachers, appropriate infrastructure and endowments...).
- b) **Accessibility** (free, economic possibilities, geographic accessibility...).
- c) **Adaptability** (curricular relevancy, educational offering according to the specific context and population...).
- d) **Acceptability** (quality of education according to needs, interests and expectations of different communities, populations and towns).

We, the Lasallians from the Continent, have discovered that the World Bank, in the last years, has become the bank of education, displacing UNESCO and other worldwide educational organisms. We are concerned about the role that the WB has established towards educational policies and reforms. Its technocratic vision has limited the possibility to rethink systematically our educational systems and improve their quality. We consider that the WB should limit its action to support economic aid and give recommendations, without imposing them as conditions to active loans... and also, that governments should show their sovereignty and work with their best people in order to recover and renovate their educational systems.

Lasallian education must look for democratization of knowledge and science through at least three main goals:

- a) Increase in the number of human beings that benefit directly from scientific and technological research, which should favor the problems of the affected poor population;
- b) Expansion of access to science, which is understood as a central component of culture;
- c) Social control of science and technology, and its orientation using ethical options and collective and explicit policies. All of these emphasize the importance of education and the popularization of science and technology in society as a whole.

There is a consensus on how knowledge constitutes a key factor for economic and social development, this is to say, to improve the standard of life for the general population and respect environmental sustainability, which is a determinant for the well being of future generations.

Likewise, knowledge by itself does not transform economies or societies, but it can accomplish it within a framework of social/national systems of science, technology and innovation, which facilitates its incorporation into the goods and services sector.

To Lasallians of Latin America the democratization of knowledge entails, among other things:

- Implementation of innovative plans along the line of education access.
- Creation of new works designed to attend the population with fewer opportunities to access education.
- Bring about the development of spaces and formal and non formal educational programs, so that excluded communities improve their life conditions and become creators of their own destiny.
- Have a bearing on national and international organisms that formulate and execute educational policies in order to achieve the democratization of knowledge.
- Know and define the needs of those who are excluded: children and youth, illiterate, alienated, indigenous people, women, elderly, disabled...
- Contribute to the theoretical framework of knowledge as to what the democratization of knowledge entails.

2.2 Access to new information and communication technologies.

From the Gutenberg Galaxy to the Digital Galaxy⁹

The world of the written letter, the Gutenberg galaxy, broke the information monopoly which ecclesiastic and nobleman had and democratized knowledge, multiplied books and libraries, reduced costs; prepared the way for the challenge that the tradition that illustration imposed with the concept “dare to think” and made possible other hierarchies. Now, the computer revolution sets even more information in the arena and, according to some scientists, threatens to erase all hierarchies. Virtual reality, according to Juan Luis Cebrián, is what is far away from our current reality: *“It is not that it doesn’t exist, and it doesn’t exist only because we imagine it, but it also integrates both the real and imaginary worlds at the same time, eliminating the physical and temporal distances between them, given that they transport information at the speed of light”*.

We, the Lasallians of the Continent, are aware that we are witnessing the emergence of the “information society”, which presumes a real transformation in the forms of development and the paradigms that give sense to our society.

New technologies become a unique reality, thanks to the development of the so called highways of information that allow connections between computers, telephones and television all integrated.

Technology has played a central role in this revolution. Technological development and innovation are the main aim of the capitalist economic system. Generation, processing and transmission of information turn into the fundamental resources of productivity and power.

However, this concept of technology is not the only one circulating around society. On the contrary, some mythical sermons usually prevail around this subject, whose main goal is to cover up the economic plot that moves and drives technological research and development.

⁹ Cf. “Con el Señor de la Cibernética”.

Looking back at “old” and “new” information technologies makes us realize the everyday use we give to these devices throughout our lives (job, hobbies, home...) having a tremendous influence on the way we understand reality.

There is no way back. We are in cyberspace and virtual reality. This term cyberspace, first used by the guru of cyberspace William Gibson, is used to refer to a parallel world, a kind of double reality from our “real” world, where people carry out many of the activities that they carry out everyday. From searching information, to looking for information on almost everything, going through the possibility of establishing interpersonal relations, visiting museums or taking courses without leaving home.

Whether we want it or not, our world walks rapidly towards a domain in which everything is ruled by technology, even when our extreme poverty does not represent the best terrain for its incorporation, use and maximum exploitation. Technology is present and marks human life on the planet, as it has never done before.

In the poorest settlements cable television coexists with musical devices or high quality televisions (even when there is not enough food, even when there are no sanitary facilities but latrines). In some of the indigenous communities there are cell phones and parabolic antennas. Urban economy is completely dependent on the computers, telephone espionage with sophisticated devices can now be done from home, and children with mid-level economic expectations grow up with computers at home now.

We have entered the global village of Marshal Mc Luhan. His prophecy came true!

Technology. Who does it serve?

Taking into account the aforementioned, there is no reason to wonder whether this world will turn into a technological world or not. That is a question that has already been answered: It is. But, for whom? Politics, economics and culture are dependent on the level of technology, which is exclusive and derived from the economic power already established. Thus, it contributes to make the powerful more powerful and the excluded even weaker.

In other words, only wealth can produce state of the art technology. And only those with access to it can get rich. As a result, we

face a vicious circle in which it is not possible, and nor will it be possible in the coming years for large groups of the population to have access to it. Given the fact that enjoyment of goods dehumanizes and living conditions of the majorities have worsened, we can affirm that ethics have not weakened, they simply do not exist.

Lasallians aware of a new breach... the digital.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, half of the world population has no access to a telephone. And millions of children, both girls and boys, together with young people in Latin America have no access to electricity; and therefore, no access to Internet. Those on the outside, compete at a disadvantage in the information society era. These distances are not only in the interior of countries but also between rich and poor countries. While 65% of the population of Sweden surfs the Net, in Colombia it only reaches 4% of the population.

Even though we are experiencing worldwide economic growth and expanding markets, as well as development of information technology, the progress offered by globalization is overshadowed by the fact that many people are excluded from these benefits and local values are in danger of disappearing with the imposition of supposed universal values.

Humanistic challenges in education regarding technology.

Serious pedagogic reflection in regards to the technological environment must begin with the understanding that even though technology is not at the service of all humanity, this does not mean that we should definitively reject it or disdain its great possibilities.

We must not put ourselves in the position of the false religious or moral leaders that condemn technology considering it as the "devil's work"; nor fall into the unimpeded weakness of thinking of those who see only a wonder with limitless capabilities that will change our lives. In other words, the new "god".

The primary educational position that Lasallians must develop in regards to technology is to understand, know, use, and get the best out of it, while applying ethical and just criteria.

This entails:

- a) Establishing new strategies for the acquisition of new technologies.
- b) Using new technologies in a rational, respectful, critical and humanizing way substituting consumer techniques for those that humanize and foster values.
- c) Training personnel in the use of the new technologies.
- d) Establishing programs and new projects that will offer the use of new quality technologies at the service of the most needy.

In this sense it is important to remember a statement of Hugo Assmann: "The promising characteristics of networks and NTIC's are connectivity and transversality. The main objective is to use them for the benefit of an education of solidarity... From a pedagogical point of view, it is imperative to work on eliminating the imbalance of the development of human beings in relation to inherent opportunities... The delay has become, above all, of hearts and minds... In the end, education for solidarity is now the most advanced and emancipating task..."¹⁰

Many questions are still floating around the galaxy. The most striking one was formulated by Juan Luis Cebrián. *It is still too early to answer the fundamental question, but it isn't too early to pose the question: Are we more human thanks to state of the art technology?*

2.3 A Quality education.

Quality education in Latin America.

"Most of the education in Latin American is poor education for the poor. If we want to achieve sustainable human development we must not accept a privileged education only for certain groups who can afford educational centers with technology, and another education, public education, where innovation and technology is very far from students."¹¹

¹⁰ Assmann, Hugo: Placer y Ternura en la Educación Madrid, Spain, 2002.

¹¹ Rosa María Torres, Ecuador Conference, May 2002.

Quality education has had as a predecessor the Total Quality Management paradigm (Japan 1950 - 1970), which was a successful model for management of companies.

UNICEF points out four important lessons regarding Quality Education:

- Access to a low quality education is synonymous with no access.
- The quality education that a child, girl or boy, receives is critical in order to guarantee genuine learning and human development.¹²
- Quality education is influenced by the events occurring both inside the classroom and outside of it.
- Education for all cannot be achieved if there is any gender discrimination.

It is not enough to grant access to school, if schools have no quality. Many young Latin American students of rural areas are finishing jr. high/high school, but this is more an apparent success than a real one since the results produced are disappointing. Former students feel frustrated and deceived because they are unable to find a job and they are not prepared for the challenges of life.

The chasm between what is taught in the classrooms and what the students really need to learn is by all means unacceptable. Thus, the existing segregation that used to take place in front of the school is now lived inside the educational system.

That is why it is so important that children, both boys and girls, go to school. But even more important than that, is that they stay and learn something. That leads us to say that the right to education does not materialize with a deficient teaching-learning process.

Towards a concept of educational quality.

Quality is a quality, and as such, it is difficult to define. For some it is the capacity to:

- Obey.
- Know what to do.

¹² And access to education with no quality is a synonym of no access at all.

- Acquire as much information as possible and about different areas.
- Achieve skills and competence put them into practice.

The World Bank insists of using concepts that consider quality as competitiveness. This is why, in most educational reforms in Latin America and the Caribbean, the private and managerial has taken precedent over the social and the public.

Public policies in education are constructed in Latin America based on a multilateral bank. According to Marco Raúl Mejía¹³, 92% of the new educational inversion takes place under its supervision and direction.

In much of Latin American postmodern education the following qualities prevail:

- Individual over social.
- Absence of utopian visions over hope.
- Empire of the present and immediate past over the distant past.
- Micro-histories of small groups, individuals, and subjectivities above national or universal history.

We must mention, however, that postmodernism, directly or indirectly helped us have a better understanding of the world, of life, of history. A less dogmatic, more cartographic understanding with less certainties and with more questions, which has helped us undress saints and put fingers inside some wounds..., which has helped us be more daring and more disrespectful before “official knowledge”...

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the neoliberal decalogue of education, centered on tax distribution, was constructed by the World Bank. And education began to be, more than an investment, an expense; and its rationalization had to be made under the criteria of productive effectiveness and efficiency.

Knowledge was reduced to standards and competences. And the reforms were based on cost-benefit criteria, with a per capita policy (payment per pupil), where the least financial cost took the place of the pedagogical project.

¹³ Conference given in Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia on July 2003.

The World Bank (WB) elaborated and spread its “learned lessons” during the decade of the 90s. Those lessons showed the Bank to be like a slow learner who gradually assimilated, often even with help from the World Bank itself and from other international organizations, what was already a part of theoretical production and of painful practical experience of Latin American countries for many years.

The eight “learned lessons¹⁴” in the framework of Education for All are:

1. The key to success is a strong political will.
2. Quality is as important as quantity.
3. Governments cannot achieve, by themselves, Education for All: alliances are essential.
4. Countries make more progress if they have developed a political framework.
5. The inefficient use of resources limits progress.
6. Education should quickly adapt to the new economic, technological and social challenges.
7. Education should be protected during crisis.
8. Educational expansion should be maintained in a growing economy.

Something that is quite clear is that quality is complex and it is related to many factors, such as:

- Qualification and formation of teachers.
- Teacher planning.
- Educational resources.
- Management function.
- Innovation.
- Educational research.
- Educational orientation.
- Evaluation.
- Level of the acquired knowledge.

¹⁴ World Bank, Education for All: From Jomtien to Dakar and Beyond. Paper prepared by the World Bank for the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal (April 26-28, 2000). Washington, D.C., 2000.

- Success and promotion.
- Work climate.
- Critical reflection of practices.
- Epistemological reflection of contents...

We Lasallians think that the following factors should be added to the above-mentioned traditional ones concerning quality:

- The capability to learn how to learn.
- Learning how to transfer the dividing lines of the previously formed world in order to create new meanings, in other words, to “unlearn” things that are already known, to get to know them again in a different way (E. Morin).
- The self-organization from the multidimensional that leads us to:
 - Educate in and from uncertainty.
 - Educate in and from enjoying life.
 - Educate in and from the meaning.
 - Educate in and from the expression.
 - Educate in and from sharing time with others.
 - Educate in and from the adapting of history and culture¹⁵.
- Education in and from the values, which requires a Christian community reference and a decision that *“life is worth living, be a person, open yourself to others and to the Other”*, as José María Mardones expressed.
- Teachers’ passion for education.

The Lasallian education should set aside the curricula and current texts which are not based on the growth of the student, of the “learner” who participates in the process, because this kind of approach does not take into account the students’ centrality in the educational process.

2.4 An education in and from the promotion of sustainable human development.

Latin America, typical landscapes:

“The States stop being entrepreneurs and they spend their time being police officers. The presidents become managers of other

persons' enterprises. The secretaries of the Treasury are good translators. Industrialists become importers. The majority depends more and more on the excess of the minorities. Workers lose their jobs. The farmers lose their small lands. Children lose their childhood. The young people lose the desire to grow. The elderly lose their pensions. "Life is a lottery", is the opinion of those who win."
Eduardo Galeano.

We have verified that, generally speaking, in Latin America and the Caribbean the essential right to a better life is not ensured. The conditions for development on a human scale do not exist.

The governments of the moment make an effort to pay their countries' huge foreign debt and forget about the social debt, of investing in solutions to the urgent needs of the poor people in their countries.

It is intolerable and unacceptable that Latin America's growth takes place at the expense of the increase of poverty! And that the wealthiest persons do not contribute to their country's growth and development. It is an aberration and a pathology to have tax systems -like the ones many Latin American nations have- where the poorest 20% of the homes has a relative tax burden that is almost twice as much as what falls on the wealthiest¹⁶ 20%. These wealthiest persons are "the ones who ought to assume greater commitments with the less wealthy sectors through bigger tax collections", says José Antonio Ocampo, General Assistant Secretary of the UN.

On the other hand, human development is a process of the broadening of people's options that includes: participation, living a long and healthy life, safety, freedom, resources for a high standard of living and the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

The expression "**sustainable development**" was used for the first time by the World Conservation Union in a publication that was prepared after the Conference of 1972. But the expression acquired importance in 1987, when the UN World Environmental and Development Commission in the so-called Brundtland

¹⁶ In the opinion of Francisco Rato, Director and Manager of the International Monetary Fund -IMF-, "one of the most important obstacles of a 'very bad' Tax system are the countries where the poorest people pay relatively more to the State than wealthy people, and this **perpetuates the extreme inequality of the region.**"

Report¹⁷, proposed *sustainable development* as a method to correct the effects of the world ecological crisis and defined it as “*the method that satisfies the needs of the present, without endangering the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs*”. This report is explicit in giving particular importance to the needs of the poor people in the world. Therefore, Redclift says: “Unless poor people are included in the satisfaction of their own aspirations, development can never be adequately sustained.”

Sustainable development should be:

- Economically possible.
- Socially fair.
- Culturally appropriate.
- Ecologically sustainable.
- Methodologically inclusive and participative.

Sustainable development is in the center of transformation and it is redefining the frontiers between what is possible and what is desirable. Educational centers should ask themselves - at the beginning of the millennium - about how to change the course of education in order to respond to the challenges of sustainable development. Isn't environmental, social, economic, political and cultural sustainable development the axis and objective to spread the character and mission of the educational reforms?

Educating in and from sustainable development places education at the service of the individual and society, and places it as a defender of the impoverished and a warning voice for social awareness.

The ethical dimension of the Gospel present in Lasallian ideology should lead to a commitment in favor of life in all its expressions.

Therefore, **Lasallian education** has the magnitude of a social project because it seeks to make social injustice disappear, giving self-improvement opportunities to those who cannot attend school and to those who work in order to be able to attend school. It proposes the development of the necessary abilities to achieve its development.

¹⁷ Gro Harlem Brundtland was the president of the Commission.

In this field, we Lasallians in the continent, specifically are called to:

- Overcome the exclusion and poverty of the popular majorities and commit ourselves to change towards a more inclusive society.
- Revise our community and professional lifestyle, our way of handling the economy and the real options of the discourse we prepare. It is an imperative that La Salle in Latin America and the Caribbean be a sign of a profound economy of communion at the direct service of the poor.
- Support the reestablishment of the Lasallian school with prophetic, transforming and innovative projects
- Organize a supportive voluntary service.
- Make people aware of the effects caused by globalization, through processes and projects which have as an axis the humanizing development for a sustainable society, which allows to face the negative effects of globalization and generate alternatives to respond to globalization.
- Form ourselves in and for sustainable development.
- Contribute to the formulation of a strategy of democracy and sustainable development, which recognizes and makes good use of the concepts of the indigenous people of the continent:

“If we wish to become rich and accumulate... it is useless to ask the natives for advice... but, if we wish to be happy, unite the human being with the divine, integrate the person and nature, combine work with inactivity, harmonize relations between generations... Then, let us talk to them.” Leonard Boff.

2.5 An education in and from respect for human rights.

“One of the most tragic situations for which the humanity should feel pain, as well as shame, is that we have constructed a world where most poor people are children. And what is even worse, where most children are poor.” Manfred Max Neef.

Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean very frequently has the face of a child: homeless boys and girls who live on the streets, child labor, boys and girls who are soldiers or victims of war, displaced, kidnapped, abused or undernourished children...

As we have seen in the first chapter, in Latin America, the population's human rights continue to be violated, especially children's, young people's, women's, handicapped persons', as well as the human rights of indigenous people.

In almost all Latin American countries - signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the UN - these rights, although contained in the letter of the law, are not respected. There is torture of prisoners, censorship of the press, violation of personal privacy, racial and social discrimination, lack of safety and the presence of violence in daily life. These conditions do not ensure the right to live better and even eliminate the right to dream of a better society. And, as Galeano says: "The right to dream is not included in the thirty human rights that the United Nations proclaimed in 1948. But, if it were not for it, and for the waters it gives us to drink, the other rights would die of thirst."

Latin American education frequently does not respect human rights.

"Extortion, insults, threats, bumps on the head, slaps, beatings, spankings, the dark room, cold showers, obligatory fasting, being forced to eat, the prohibition to go out, the prohibition to say what one thinks, the prohibition to say what one feels, and public humiliation, are some of the methods for punishing and torturing that are traditional in the life of the family and school. As punishment for disobedience and a chastisement of freedom, the family and school traditions perpetuate a culture based on fear, and this culture humiliates women, teaches children and students to lie and transmits the plague of fear. Human rights would have to begin at home and at school..."¹⁸

In Latin America and the Caribbean, people used to say that, pedagogy in schools was characterized by the Piaget or the Pinochet method. That means that the teaching methods are not always really pedagogical.

Frequently, teaching is repressive; it inhibits potentials, represses creativity and turns students into fearful persons before the reality of life. This happens in a society that proposes - at least theoretic-

¹⁸ Adapted from Eduardo Galeano.

cally - to guarantee respect for human rights. First of all, they should be imposed by the force of law. But that is not enough, as experience proves.

Educating in and from respect for human rights makes education center on the fundamental problems of individuals and society. And that teachers leave the “political neutrality that makes us easily manipulated persons by those who have political power. The preservation of status, the transmission of the middle class values is carried out thanks to many teachers’ non-critical and conformist attitude¹⁹.”

The Lasallian school promotes the knowledge of and respect for human rights because the objective aspect of the laws that guarantees them must be complemented with an education in and from human rights in order to turn them into a cultural consensus deeply rooted in people’s feelings, thoughts and acts²⁰.

Some pedagogical challenges to educate in and from human rights.

- Speaking about human rights and people’s rights becomes an essential assumption of an education that has the purpose to modify the relations between persons and groups, within the principles of tolerance and respect towards what is different.
- Group, ethnic and collective rights should be in harmony with individual rights in such a way that the defense of said individual rights means a consolidation of group, ethnic and collective rights.
- Not confusing rights with privileges: or are we capable of admitting that the night watchman’s right to disturb all the inhabitants’ sleep; the landowner’s right to extend his lands towards the inner part of native reserves; and a nation’s right to impose its economic model on a whole continent?

In this field, we Latin American Lasallians are called to:

- Generate processes that allow the creation of awareness about the situations of the victims of injustice, violence, abuse and exploitation, especially of children and young people.

¹⁹ Francisco Gutiérrez, Conferencia: “La educación como praxis política”, Guatemala 2000.

²⁰ Cf. Frei Betto, ALAI, 2002.

- Promote processes and projects that have, as an axis, the defense of children's and young people's rights.
- Develop plans of formation at all levels.
- Develop actions and programs of denouncement and participation while defending against injustices.
- Revise our practices, ideologies, regulations, ways of organization, manuals about how to live together with others... in the light of human rights.
- Educate persons and groups in an attitude that makes them feel, think, and act based on the complete respect for human rights and for people's rights.

Finally, educating in and from the human rights makes us make up our mind before the social reality, it demands that we do not remain indifferent before the violated justice, the infringed freedom, the violated human rights, exploited workers Choosing justice, freedom, democracy, ethics, public welfare.

The Latin American Lasallian
Regional Education Project
- PERLA -



"In view of the situation of despair that our children and young people on our Continent live, we dream of being a Region of Hope. Passionate because of the plan of the Kingdom of the Father, seduced by Jesus Christ and encouraged by the Spirit, we commit ourselves to construct a RELAL at the educational service of the poor so that together and by association, Laymen and Brothers, we all respond to the educational urgencies of the 21st century, through the construction and implementation of a Latin American Lasallian Region Educational Project -PERLA-, which shall unify the criteria for the acts of the different educational communities of Latin America and the Caribbean."

VIII Meeting of RELAL, 2001.

3.1 Background of the PERLA project.

The Eighth Meeting of RELAL²¹...

The 43rd General Chapter took up again very clearly and radically the option for the poor. It is obvious that the educational work for the poor nowadays has particular characteristics that make it different from what was done in the past. The worldwide economy and the neoliberal model have given origin to a new category of poor: the excluded. That is the reason why this Chapter calls for an answer for this situation, so that the opportunities for everybody can be globalized and so that the excluded are integrated into history.

The Eighth Meeting of RELAL on February of the year 2001 took up again the preferential option of the General Chapter, and made a daring declaration regarding the **“Region that we want”** for the next years, the first ones of this millennium.

This Meeting started with the acknowledgement of the deeply felt situation of despair of the young and from the need to reestablish the consecration of the Lasallians on the Continent, so that, from there, it would be possible to discover the need to work on a common educational project that characterized and identified our work in the region, gave us unity in the development of our education task, and facilitated interdependence.

From the beginning, we knew that the Institute’s options for the **Association**, the **Interdependence** and the **Service to the poor and the excluded** demand from us an education project that allows us to focus in the same direction. The intellectual and spiritual enlightenment presented in this Meeting - by Brothers Alvaro Rodriguez and Miguel Campos - offered essential elements that became the starting point for the PERLA. On the other hand, Brother Jardelino Menegat, the Regional Director, in his participation at the beginning of the Meeting, courageously presented the need to take a step forward in interdependence. He mentioned that the existence in the Region of some “very important works” - due to the quality of its company as well as the bravery

²¹ Cf. Gómez, Carlos, Reflexiones en torno al Proyecto Educativo Regional, Bogotá, 2001.

of its mission among the poorest - were like a sign of the times. He said that these works would be the first calls for crystallizing the Educational Project of the Region.

Beginning of the Latin American Lasallian Regional Education Project - PERLA.

The Visitors' Conference (CLAV), governed by the General Meeting of RELAL, created the Regional Educational Mission Team - made up of laymen and brothers²² - with the purpose of encouraging the participative formulation and the implementation of the Latin American Lasallian Regional Education Project PERLA.

Those attending understood PERLA as the expression of following the paths of Jesus in Latin America and as the main means to live the association on the Continent. They also understood it as a project that would unite the criteria for the action of the different educational communities in Latin America and the Caribbean, as a common framework of reference for our Districts and for the development of the Lasallian education ministry in the region, and as a coordinating answer to the above-mentioned educational urgencies.

Since the beginning, PERLA has been defined as "a personal and community commitment of faith, and it has come true through a systematic proposal of transformation of the educational and social reality in Latin America and the Caribbean".

To initiate the process, some sub-regional meetings were held (Mexico, Bogota and Porto Alegre) achieving a first approximation to the construction of an Educational Project for the whole region. The contribution of those meetings was the starting point of the process and of a Latin American movement.

One year later, the Regional Mission Team, taking into consideration information obtained from all over the continent, offered the

²² These persons have been members of the Regional Educational Mission Team: Carlos Jamade, Rodolfo Vivanco, Arcadio Bolívar, Salvador Valle, Jardelino Menegat, Oscar Ibarra Russi, José Antonio Vargas, Carlos David Domínguez, Julio Cortabitarte, José David Berbesí, María Elena Proner, Sandra Eugenia Posada, Santiago Amurrio, Beatriz Gómez, Myriam Camilo, Edgar Nicodem, Antonio Boza, Juan Carlos Maldonado, Luis Enrique Ruiz, Javier Castagnola, Carlos Gómez y Oscar Azmitia.

first version of PERLA and submitted it to the opinion and contributions of the Lasallians from all over the region.

In this first version, PERLA is defined as the expression of the Latin American dream based on the Lasallian education ministry, which contained in its central axis:

- Invites the continuous process of reflection-action,
- Unifies and gives a meaning to the task of education,
- Coordinates the new “Islands of Creativity projects”, which come up in the Districts as answers to the challenges of reality,
- Gives coherence to all the programs of formation of Laymen and Brothers,
- Gives an identity to the Mission on the Continent,
- Proposes new works for the educational service of the poor,
- Inspires the local projects of every Lasallian undertaking,
- Offers interdependence spaces between our Districts and countries, and
- Generates the topics that will be investigated and reflected on by the authorities that generate thought.

From the beginning, the Latin American Lasallian Regional Educational Project - PERLA - was a call for widening and renewing the participative energy of the Lasallians on the continent in order to respond to the situation in Latin America and the Caribbean and to their urgent educational needs.

And also, from the beginning, it sought to acknowledge the new circumstances of poverty and poverty itself as the principal grounds to invoke the creative and generous answers that our Lord of History expects Lasallians to give in accordance with the foundational inspiration that motivates us.

The sum total and the road taken by PERLA is a result of numerous meetings and events within each of the Latin American and Regional Districts. A large number of schools and institutions of higher education, as well as informal educational works we are in charge of, took the PERLA as a reference, and they made it theirs.

This has resulted in the redefining of actions in some cases, the widening of operation margins in others, and, step by step, the

emergence of educational works with forms that are completely enriched or different from the existing ones, infused with the spirit that inspired the project as the driving force to travel the road that leads to the poor.

Changing the social position of our educational communities as the condition to discover the meanings of the new poverties of our time, while at the same time focusing our actions at some of their deepest causes, based on our educational mission, is likewise a process of greater collective implication, where Brothers, as well as Associates and Laymen are constructing the Institution's future face in the Latin American region.

The organization of PERLA...

PERLA was organized around five major criteria:

1. **Courage** to look for the solutions to the educational urgencies
2. **Preferential attention to the most excluded groups** in the region
3. **Being prophetic in** the preferential and evangelical option for the impoverished and for the creation of transforming projects
4. **Realism** in its response to challenges and real requirements of the Latin American region
5. **Generator of a Latin American and Caribbean movement** from the bottom up and from inside out.

The PERLA Project as a movement.

The participation of many Latin American Lasallians has made it possible to create a participative process; a movement that seeks to change the face with which the Lasallians in Latin America and the Caribbean want to be known. A movement that seeks to recover and maintain the collective fire.

A coordinating movement with multiple reflections and actions that nowadays are already being carried out, and that proposes to stay as an axis that will serve as a reference for the actions that are still pending.

It is clearly understood that PERLA is a process, and as such, it can be improved, updated and consolidated with the reflection that continuously generates our practices.

PERLA in the context of the Association...

The fundamental event that links today's Institute with its origins took place on June 6 of the year 1694, when John Baptist De La Salle and twelve of his colleagues joined together to dedicate their lives - without turning back - to the Christian education of impoverished boys and girls.

Remembering this event, the PERLA was put forward again in the context of the Meeting of "Associates for the Educational Service of the Poor", which was held in Conocoto, Ecuador. This meeting was a very important moment of reflection about the meaning of the Association in Latin America and the Caribbean; there, the PERLA was adopted as a commitment of the Lasallians in the new perspective of the Mission through association.

A New Impulse for PERLA...

PERLA received a new impulse in the RELAL meeting, which was held in Fusagasuga, Colombia, in the year 2004. There, the idea that it should not be a "completed document", but that it should help us begin and put us on the right track was reaffirmed.

In Fusagasuga, it was clearly expressed that this was not just about looking back with satisfaction at the achievements of the past, but about looking towards the future as we include new views, new answers to the challenges that the changing reality of Latin American and world presents us.

This meeting mentioned the following challenges:

- Solving the requirements of impoverished children and young people on a continent that is structurally unjust
- Generating processes and spaces which make Association for the Mission possible in the educational service of the poor
- Participating in the construction of the common evangelizing pedagogical vision for the Region.

These challenges are urgent. They directly involve us and thrust us into action because, as Brother Alvaro said: "We must have mercy based on solidarity, which means that we must allow ourselves to feel the suffering of those around us, act against the

avoidable suffering, and assume the task of finding roads towards hope and transformation²³.”

3.2 The fundamental axes of PERLA.

The Explicit Announcement of the Gospel.

The explicit announcement of the Gospel has been a fundamental dimension of PERLA and its transverse axis, “The essence and the reason of existence of Christian education is the announcement of Jesus. Since the days of the establishment of the Institute, its Founder and the first Brothers made sure that the school was a means for evangelization. Teaching the catechism became, from the beginning, the Brothers’ main task and, today, due to the Institute’s evolution, it is also the main task of the Lasallians who are committed to the Mission. In Latin America, perhaps because we believe that it is a Christian continent, we have not identified the theme as essential. Sometimes, we are satisfied with giving classes on ethics inspired in Christianity, or with using religious language in our institutions, but this has more to do with the form than with the content of things. I consider it is necessary to insist again on the preaching of the “kerigma” because, basically, the new evangelization will not only announce Jesus and his liberating message again, but will also announce the good news of salvation. This is not about, as John Paul II expresses, evangelizing once again, but about a new evangelization, new in its methods, new in its ardor, and new in its expression.”²⁴

PERLA has the purpose of communicating to the world the explicit announcement of the Gospel with all its enthusiasm in order to promote the “awakening” and the education of the faith in a way that the faith will be connected with the culture of children and young people in 21st century Latin America.

On the other hand, PERLA has in its foundations three essential axes, which jointly give a greater intensity to the project that is being constructed.

²³ Brother Alvaro Rodríguez, III Congreso of UMAEL, Mexico, 2003.

²⁴ Carlos Gómez, Reflexiones en torno al Proyecto Educativo Regional, Bogotá, 2001.

Theological-pastoral axis.

This axis is expressed in the following way:

- A **theology of incarnation**, which finds in the option of Jesus its starting point; *“The Lord’s spirit has chosen me to give the good news to the poor.”* (Lc. 4, 18).
- A **ecclesiology of communion** through which we acknowledge ourselves as God’s people (the Second Vatican Council and documents of the Latin American Episcopate: Puebla and Medellin), where each person has been called to participate in the project of the Beatitudes (Theology of Baptism).
- An **apostolic spirituality**, oriented towards commitment, towards the development of a Christian experience, understood as a vocation for service (vocational and youth pastoral and lay ministries).

Anthropological-pedagogical axis.

The dimensions of this axis are as follows:

- A **humanizing, liberating and transforming process**, centered on the individual and his/her dignity as a child of God and brother or sister of the universe; called to participate and construct the new civilization of love from harmonious social coexistence. It emphasizes the individual’s centrality, his/her right to participate and live in a democratic society, as well as in the respect for the rights of children and young people.
- An **evangelizing and prophetic process** which announces, reveals, comforts, reconciles and celebrates the brotherhood of men and women, and the cosmos.

Sociological-cultural axis.

This axis has the following characteristics:

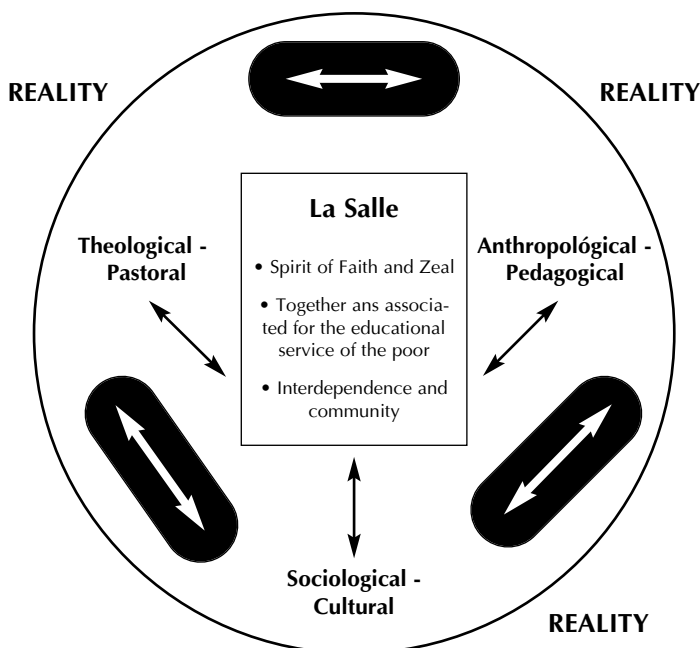
- The **individual’s leading role** in all the processes and projects, what makes us consider the teacher a transforming agent of reality and commit ourselves in his or her dignification. Emphasis is made on formation, equal opportunities and equity of gender.
- **Social and cultural processes** which demand that we live authentic intercultural processes based on the respect, assessment, promotion and sometimes defense of the local cultures, in a context of a coexistence based on the relations among

cultures; paying attention to cultural politics and globalization processes, and raising our awareness of the importance of ecological harmony.

- **Democracy**, understood as the promotion of a culture of peace and justice for which we must educate ourselves and educate a new citizenry, in order to have an economy based on solidarity, and sustainable development. Emphasis is made on education by and for an economy supportive of sustainable development.
- **Ecumenism - Dialogue between religions**, which commits us to formation in and respect for openness and inclusion when dealing with what is different (other types of faith, street children, the elderly, indigenous cultures, etc.).

The following graph synthesizes this view:

EXES AND FOUNDATIONS



Reality as the context, La Salle at the center, guaranteeing its spirit and the three axes combining to give coherence to the Latin American Lasallian Regional Educational Project - PERLA.

4

The Programs of the Latin American Lasallian Regional Educational Project - PERLA -



"It is clear that the experience lived in his days by John Baptist De La Salle does not offer any solution for the Institute's life today... I do not consider it a model that should be reproduced, but a witness of the Spirit; John Baptist De La Salle is not, for me, an oracle, but a prophet of the Spirit, the Founder is not an excuse, and even less, a yoke which excuses us from inventing, but a travel companion along the roads of the Spirit that need to be traced out and discerned."

Bro. Michael Sauvage

Planning and walking together have allowed us to look more clearly and more intensely towards where we should be going and how to avoid duplicating efforts. PERLA called us together to a continuous reflection-action process that has given more meaning to our educational work.

PERLA has given us the opportunity to go from educational speech to pedagogical speech, from theory to practice, from ideologies to reality. It has allowed us to anticipate events, to foretell the possible scenarios and the viability of our proposals. It has helped us to be courageous and prophetic and to set out without fear. It has made us complete Horace's "dare to know" with "dare to act when you know".

Risk without knowledge is dangerous, but knowledge without risk is useless. Risking oneself means beyond what is visible, guided by a reasonable projection of reality. Projection into the future is today an inseparable element of change.

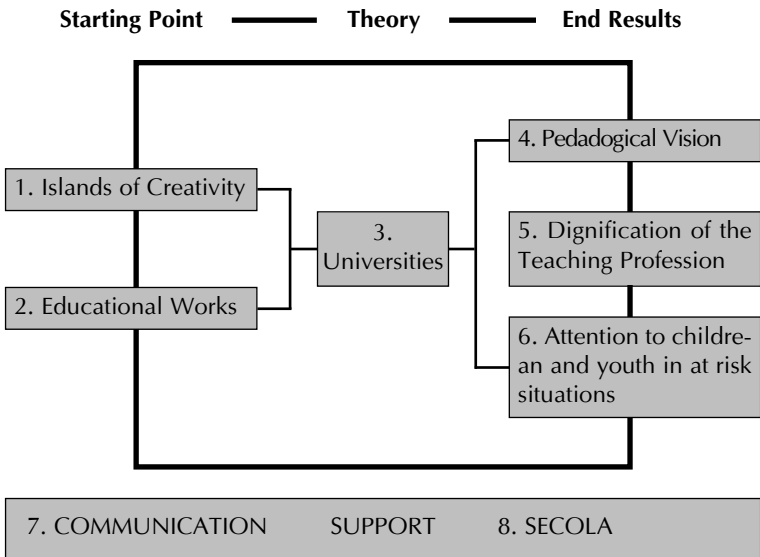
The six programs of PERLA are designed to respond to the commitment to the permanent transformation of Lasallian education in the Region. They point out the roads that we want to travel leaving footprints of our intentions in response to the urgent educational needs in the Region.

These programs are²⁵:

- Islands of Creativity.
- Formal and Informal Educational Works.
- Universities, Colleges and Higher Education Centers.
- Attention to Children and Youth in at risk situations.
- Construction of the Lasallian Pedagogical Vision.
- Dignification of the Teaching Profession.

The following graph gives an overall idea of them:

²⁵ An operating description of these projects can be found in the Attachments of the Operative Plan of PERLA 2004-2005.



The following is a description of each of the six programs and their two supports.

4.1 Islands of creativity.

“The best way to honor and be loyal to De La Salle’s spirit is not so much by maintaining the educational works we have inherited, but by responding creatively and courageously to the educational needs that today’s world presents us.” Brother Álvaro Rodríguez E., IALU, Barcelona 2004.

Brother Alvaro told the Meeting of the RELAL that “in order to reestablish our life - without stopping our efforts for the complete renewal of our communities and works - we should make possible, in each District, the existence of one or more **communities and works** like *“Islands of Creativity”* (Joe Holland), experimental experiences that may open future roads.”

It is a fact that in the Region there have always been Islands of Creativity, some of them little known and others which have appeared recently, but all of them responding to the updating of our charisma, to the new beginning of our life, and to the spirit of the association for the educational service of the poor.

In May of 2003, in Guatemala, 34 Lasallian experiences on new alternatives of the Mission were shared. Doubtless, it was a tremendous display of creativity and of inspirations of the Spirit. It is difficult to look for a description to group them together; but generally speaking we could say that some experiences emphasize topics such as ethno-education (natives, Afro-American community) and their particular methodologies (schools, broadcasting, formal and informal educational spaces, etc.); others are ingenious projects carried out in the formal school (the rights of the child, social awareness and justice); some are formal or non-formal schools for giving attention to the poorest (shantytowns, immigrants, socially excluded people), while others emphasize popular education (liberating pedagogy and its methodologies); some are aimed at the attention and formation of teachers in difficult areas either because of the social conditions, the lack of support they receive from the government or the church, or in isolated places that are not easily reached; finally, others emphasize the missionary voluntary service.

In spite of the variety, all of them have the purpose of serving the poor and promoting social justice. Some Islands of Creativity are challenged by different factors: the need to go deeper into the pedagogical political project of experiences, the lack of regular financing, few sustainability strategies and the lack of continuity of the personnel, among others.

Sharing these experiences and projects has been a source of inspiration for our Districts, and, in addition, has offered the possibility of creating new projects.

To continue developing this program, PERLA proposes:

- To pedagogically systematize and conceptualize Islands of Creativity in order to construct and update Lasallian pedagogy for the 21st century in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- To make known throughout society through publications and other means these experiences and the Lasallian pedagogy in Latin America, facing the 21st century.
- To design, organize and hold meetings of formation for the personnel of the islands of creativity.
- To design, establish and evaluate an inter-islands of creativity communication system for the purpose of gathering feedback and enriching the on-going experiences.

4.2 Formal and informal education works.

"We should not take the name of La Salle in vain." (José Pablo Basterrechea).

"We do it when we turn it into a museum piece or reduce it to a memory of the days when we were students and which, as the Spanish poet Jorge Manrique says, were always the best. We do it when the present is only a time for festive celebrations or for projects based on our own interests. We do not take the name of La Salle in vain, when, looking into the future, the Lasallian values that we learned in the classroom inspire us to real service in favor of children, young people, the poor, fraternity, peace and unity in the human family." (Brother Álvaro, III UMAEL Congress, Mexico, 2003).

With this second program, PERLA intends to include each and every Lasallian on the continent, regardless of where they might be. The option for the poor and the promotion of justice concerns all of us and not only those who serve and work in Islands of Creativity.

We must acknowledge that through the launching of PERLA, some works of formal education have been progressing in aspects such as the following:

- An increasing number of laymen have identified themselves even more with the Lasallian project.
- A revision is being made of the educational projects in many Lasallian works.
- Experiences from campus ministry in schools are being set up to be fully incorporated into the pastoral life of the educational center.
- A larger number of Brothers has expressed an attitude of increased openness regarding the theme of association.
- There has been a gradual heightening of awareness for the defense of the child. In some cases, training plans and programs on the rights of children and youth have been set up in the Lasallian works on the continent.
- More participative processes of collective construction have been encouraged and initiated in the Region, and networks have been created where educational experiences are exchanged.

- New technologies have been incorporated, together with a reflection on their ethical use.
- Formation programs for teachers have been initiated, and some of these programs have university recognition.

Some of the limitations of the formal and informal education works are the following:

- In some formal and informal educational works, there is still some resistance to change. There are structures that are difficult to update and put into the perspective indicated by PERLA.
- More work is needed concerning urgent topics: Human Rights, Sustainable Development, etc.
- The Christian commitment and experience of solidarity of young people are not fully achieved.

This program will help us make Brother Alvaro's insightful idea a reality. This idea consists of considering that "The best way to honor and be faithful to De La Salle's spirit is not so much by maintaining the educational works we have inherited, but responding creatively and courageously to the educational needs that today's world presents to us." (IALU, Barcelona, 2004).

In order to continue developing this program, PERLA proposes:

- The establishment of formation programs - directed to administrators and teachers- to delve deeply into the ethical and political dimensions of education tending to the transformation of the works.
- The evaluation of the pastoral ministry in each District and its works in order to respond to the needs of the evangelization of today's children and youth, and the promotion of pastoral ministry in schools.
- The continued reflection upon educational urgencies, working on one per year: the democratization of knowledge, new technologies, quality education, education about and for human rights and sustainable development; having as a transversal axis the explicit announcement of the Gospel and culture as the place where the announcement will be received.
- The contribution to the construction of the Lasallian pastoral pedagogical vision.

The support of the persons in charge of education of each of the Districts is essential in this program.

4.3 Universities, colleges and centers of higher education.

“The growth of Lasallian universities in almost all the Regions in the world, unprecedented in the history of the Institute, is a sign of the times that we cannot ignore... I would like to invite you to live looking forward, without forgetting your roots, in order to imagine new ways to respond to today’s problems, being creators in your initiatives and offering to those who are not benefited by the globalization we live today, new roads, exciting initiatives and alternatives that can give meaning to their lives.” Brother Álvaro, IALU, Barcelona 2004.

The meeting of the Brother Visitors with the Institutions of Higher Education in the Region was very important in the construction process of PERLA. This was probably the moment in the history of the region when the connections and responsibility of the universities and centers of higher education with the Latin American Lasallian Regional Educational Project -PERLA- were most strongly felt.

At this meeting, a clear understanding was achieved of the need to create a Lasallian view about higher education in the service of the poor and for the promotion of justice, as well as the certainty that research in Lasallian universities can and should contribute to the improvement of the quality of Lasallian education on the continent, and the construction of the Lasallian pastoral pedagogical vision.

In recent years, we can verify that:

1. There has been an unprecedented growth of universities and centers of higher education in Latin America.
2. There are higher education institutions that have shown themselves open to participating in the proposals of RELAL and PERLA. It has been here that the reflection on the Regional Educational Project and its implications has developed with more depth.

3. There is an ambivalent reality between lay persons-administrators and laypersons participating in the revitalization of university life using the format of association.
 - Even though there is an academic structure and physical resources which guarantee that human and Christian themes will be dealt with orderly and systematically, by fostering insertion activities and work for people in need, these processes do not always cause an impact on the student's life. And neither do they always impact the development of the university community, whose job it is to promote commitments of solidarity with the real needs of the poor.
 - The pastoral ministry of the university has often become just the administrator of sacramental rituals.
 - In many cases, the Lasallian University goes on carrying out the task of teaching the Faith and not a real evangelization of the Culture.

PERLA is based on the idea that the Lasallian university proposal should not take refuge in dispassionate academia, in science that serves nobody, but which ends up serving only those who pay for it, or in teaching activities that ignore the world that breathes and suffers beyond the classroom. And that what matters is that the Lasallian university be aware of reality and of its service to the poorest and that it foster an alternative to an exclusive way of thinking.

Due to this, the program proposes to promote the following:

- The continuation of the conferences with the personnel of universities and higher education centers to foster the knowledge of PERLA.
- The design of a quality Lasallian accreditation system which starts from a critical revision of the accreditation systems currently promoted in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The design and promotion of a virtual diploma program on Lasallian studies.
- A comparative research project on youth cultures in the region.

- A research project on the situation of the rights of the child in the region.
- A catechistic and evangelizing proposal in the light of the results of the above-mentioned research, establishing a relationship of dialogue between faith and culture.

4.4 Attention to children and youth in at risk situations.

“The capability of these children to go on always caused me curiosity and today it causes me admiration, because I love life... I know dozens of children aged seven or eight, who take wonderful care of their younger brothers and/or sisters, they bring them up, educate them, and it is amazing to see how skillfully they hold them on their hips from one place to another. At nine years old, they are able to overcome their family’s terrible financial situation by selling handkerchiefs at traffic lights... Hopefully the day will come when people’s moral conscience makes them raise up monuments to the people who sell handkerchiefs at traffic lights, to the quick and hard-working teenage delivery boys, to the those handing out advertising leaflets, to the collectors of used cardboard and paper that, with their economy submerged as underground currents of water, breathe life into the most humble gardens, preventing the voracity of the few from draining everything.” Martínez Reguera²⁶.

The situation of children and youth in Latin America has changed little. Poverty continues to have the face of a little boy or girl. Children in at risk situations are not only the ones that wander the streets, but also the millions of children that are victims of fragmented societies, of broken families, of unfair or disproportionate jobs, of bad educational systems and dehumanizing media.

The Institute has never forgotten its fundamental link with the poor, especially children and young people. Somehow, this concern should become the core of the reflection of the Region in as much as it constitutes a painful and shameful social phenomenon.

We could say that the defense of the Rights of the Child has always been present in our history, and this is true if we under-

²⁶ Cachorros de nadie, Madrid, Ed. Popular, 179 y 180.

stand defense of rights as having always had schools for poor children. But, when Brother John Johnston surprised the Institute with this theme, deep down he was expressing the need to take it on with new interpretations, in the light of the current situation of childhood, in the contexts of the different countries in the world, and with a new charismatic inspiration, so much so that it can be a theme that makes us see and carry out in a different way the educational charisma of the Lasallian educational ministry. In his letter dated January of 1999, Brother John expressed that:

“...the situation of poor children in the world today is an inexplicable scandal and our Lasallian charisma invites us to support the defenseless, abandoned, marginalized and exploited and that it should constitute a special moral commitment of our Mission.”

The 43rd General Chapter, in Proposal 14, reinstated the transcendence of the theme and requested its inclusion as a priority in its action plans for the next seven years. In other words, the theme has been established today in the privileged space reserved for the personal experience of the Lasallian ministry and we could even say that all our educational institutions and works must include it as an essential part.

Although there have been new experiences, mostly in isolated cases, they are still the exception to the rule in our Region.

That is why the PERLA project proposes the following:

- To carry out a diagnosis of the situation of children and youth in the Region with the support of our universities and centers of higher education.
- To analyze and define actions, experiences and projects of educational services at the District level, along the lines of popular education, so that young people, both boys and girls in at risk social situations, who are being attended to, can have, once again, the expectation of living and the capacity to dream. This will require the formation of teachers in special competencies.
- To seek contacts and alliances with other institutions and organizations that have decided to serve children and youth in at risk situations.

4.5 Construction of the Lasallian pedagogical-pastoral vision.

The Regional Meeting perceived the importance of jointly constructing the Pedagogical-Pastoral Vision of the Lasallians on the continent. This Vision will allow us to have common points of view, establish guidelines for reflection and action, and clarify intentions. Nevertheless, as a vision, it will always be an ideal in evolution, which is being modified in the process of evolving.

We propose to turn the Pedagogical-Pastoral Vision into the great frame of reference that will give meaning and light the way of the other projects of PERLA. That is to say, to turn it into the philosophical, theological and pedagogical basis on which the Lasallian educational dynamics in Latin America is derived.

This is not to make it a straightjacket for the Region. On the contrary, the freedom for initiatives in each District will have a uniting element that will give orientation and meaning to its construction.

The Vision will be a result of a collective production and not the reflection of the thought of three or four specialists. It will have the stamp and the mark of this Latin American moment, but it will collect the history and reflection of Lasallians who have committed themselves in the past and have been pioneers in mercifully embracing reality exactly where it hurts the most: the poor.

This Vision proposes to “recover that search for meaning in the daily things that have characterized La Salle’s works, that capacity to be open to question oneself and to look for alternative answers derived from the evolution of educational life, where tension will always exist between that which remains invariable and that which changes, between the peremptory and the innovative, between ignorance and knowledge...”²⁷

The Vision²⁸:

- Will not try to establish uniformity, but unity.
- Will not seek separation, but the interaction with other institutional and/or District efforts and texts.

²⁷ Horizonte Pedagógico de Argentina-Paraguay.

²⁸ Idem.

- Will not declare null and void singular experiences, but it will recover and name them.
- Will not refer to what “should be”, but what “we plan”.
- Will not elaborate regulations, but a general framework that will serve as a mechanism that gives new meaning to what has already been done, what is being done, and what will be done along the lines of an integrated pastoral pedagogical, much like a synthesis that does not admit work in parallel.
- Will not be a proposal that will be thought of by others, but “with” others.
- Will not decide, with a critical eye, what is and what is not authorized, but will secure a view that reads and facilitates the search for new angles and perspectives to approach the complexity of a field and the difficulty of its permanent challenges.

Finally, this Vision will not only refer to the group of shared meanings in the Latin American region, but also to tensions, debates, rituals and patterns which operate within it, and among the actors who spend a great part of the day together, five or six days a week and many weeks a year, and how this results in practices and experiences in classrooms, halls, recesses, meetings, courses...

Its intention is to become **a guide** to help Lasallians in the Region with their duties in order to direct the institution in its own project and to make it possible for the educational community to evaluate their Lasallian membership.

4.6 Dignification of the teaching profession for social transformation.

It is a fact that the Founder devoted himself more to the formation of teachers than to the direct education of children... the education of the Brothers themselves as teachers and the education of teachers for the countryside. Both initiatives express a response to a specific need to the educational problems of its days. They express our Founder's spiritual attitude, always aware and allowing himself to be impressed by reality as a theological place of God's presence and call. The Founder understood before long that the Brothers' spiritual education required an attention to their

professional formation as well. They would not be able to “evangelize” through the practice of their teaching profession unless they were competent and qualified teachers. Thus, Founder became concerned about their technical education. (Sauvage y Campos, Anunciar el Evangelio a los pobres, p. 226).

Few professions have been valued so little: teachers are accused of perpetuating the system, of having remained anchored to obsolete methodology, but at the same time, their profession is one of the worst paid and least acknowledged. In many cases, the teacher, more than one who serves society, is considered as an employee of the students’ parents, and many see in this profession a solution to the inability to find better social and economic opportunities.

In reality, teachers are victims of this burden, which weighs on their shoulders, diminishing their vocation and weakening their best intentions. “Teachers have the honor of being, simultaneously, the worst problem and the best solution in education”, says Michael Fullan.

Latin American Lasallians acknowledge teachers as important persons playing the leading role for change, because they represent the curriculum and the pedagogy: their beliefs, knowledge, values, competences and performance are more defining about how and what is taught (and learned) and how in the classroom and in the academic institution, than the prescribed curriculum (the written curriculum, the mission statement).

And we are convinced that the need to form teachers was a priority to De La Salle and that this seemed to be his fundamental pedagogical objective, as Brother Pedro Chico states.

The task for the dignification of the teaching profession involves a long road and it will require a lot of imagination.

Based on the idea that the formation of teachers is an essential part of the Institute’s establishment, and that the option for the educational service to the poor will be more coherent if teachers are involved, **PERLA purposes in this program:**

- To initiate a Latin American Lasallian movement which will identify us in the next ten years. One that is in favor of education as a public good and in favor of the dignification of the Latin American teaching profession.

- To diagnose the social, cultural and economic aspects that will accurately report the condition of public education and of the teaching profession in our countries.
- To make a comparative analysis of the status of public education as well as the teaching profession in the Region.
- To dignify the teaching profession through increased awareness in public opinion and in education policies of the importance of valuing this vocation and, as a consequence, improve its pedagogical and labor conditions.
- To look for ways that lead to the fulfillment of this unavoidable and essential pillar of PERLA. Sensitizing and raising public awareness, publications and alliances with institutions that fight alongside the teaching profession for public education and the recognition of teachers, are a part of these mechanisms.

PERLA offers us the opportunity to be recognized on the continent for the defense of public education and, together with many men and women of goodwill in Latin America and the Caribbean, to promote the dignification of the teaching profession.

To carry out these six programs, PERLA has the support of two projects:

a) Communication at the service of PERLA.

In an educational project such as PERLA, communication is of great importance to achieve the exchange that encourages the attainment of these programs and to contribute to the strengthening of the Latin American Lasallian family.

PERLA has the objective, among other actions, of creating a communicative platform which allows for two-way exchange between brothers, laymen and the different teams, communities and works.

b) SECOLA at the service of PERLA

The Latin American Educational Cooperation Service Foundation (Fundación Servicio de Cooperación Educativa Latinoamericana - SÉCOLA) has the mission of providing the financial support that PERLA requires. This will be accomplished through the solidarity of Lasallians and of other persons and institutions.

SÉCOLA proposes to launch solidarity campaigns and implement an observatory of justice and peace centered around the right to quality education for children and young people in the Region.

PERLA's programs point to a new paradigm...

This new paradigm will be designed on the Pastoral Pedagogical Vision, a new paradigm where education will focus on **learning experiences**²⁹. These experiences:

1. **Are part of life**, and hopefully, of everyday life. The outstanding performance of the participants is an essential pedagogical requirement.
2. **Enter through the senses**, and hopefully, through all of the senses. They are experiences that are felt. The development of the capacity to feel is another essential requirement of learning.
3. **Are joyfully experienced** and in an pleasant atmosphere.
4. **Stimulate interest and appeal**. They involve students.
5. **Gestate, create and recreate relations with the context**, which is one of the starting points.
6. **Accommodate personal, community and social implications**.
7. **Help transform reality**.
8. **Connect with the learner through meditation and the connecting guidelines**.
9. **Are exposed through interaction metaphors**, which is the only language capable of accessing to complexity, because, as Bateson says: "The metaphor is life itself."
10. **Make good use of technological resources for the development of the being**.
11. **Contribute pedagogical spaces that channel learning experiences starting from the notion of territory**. Territory is defined as a "spatial unit consisting of a social fabric of its own (with its own history and culture), established upon a base with particular natural resources, which presents certain ways of pro-

²⁹ Cf. Gutiérrez y Prado, Conferencia, Guatemala, 2005.

duction, consumption and exchange, and which is governed also by particular institutions and ways of organization.” (IICA 2002).

PERLA’s Programs are a call to the new establishment...

If we carry out the aforementioned programs, we will be more important and less innocuous in the sociopolitical context we inhabit. As Brother Álvaro Rodríguez said “We cannot go on having such faded political positions if the fate of the poor depends on a world where few persons are interested in their fate.” Given the fact that “our Institute was established on the frontier of dehumanization” and that today we stand by perplexed at another process of dehumanization with similar nuances, but in contexts and realities that are very different from the ones that originated the Institute’s establishment, this will surely make PERLA the scenario where we will be able to bring about the **new establishment**³⁰.

Conclusion.

Without a doubt, PERLA is the most coherent and productive RELAL project with far-reaching implications in time and extension.

PERLA demands from us an attitude of change, because, as Espriu has written: “Without human tension, there is no mutation. Without passion... or compassion, there will not be enough persistence in rebelliousness. Those who once were committed to change are now docile. And the indispensable “civil conspiracy”, as Pedro Duran Farell likes to call it, ends prematurely and is satisfied with things as they are, giving up trying to achieve that they be as they should be³¹.”

Although it is true that it may seem that there is a void of ideologies, it is also true that there is not, there should not be, there cannot be a void of ideas and ideals. Let us return to De La Salle’s collective fire and let us commit ourselves to the formation of better

³⁰ Gómez, Carlos, Reflexiones en torno al Proyecto Educativo Regional, Bogotá, 2001.

³¹ Conferencia de Federico Mayor, Barcelona, 2003.

persons and of a more equitable and inclusive new society, and to the construction of an education that acts as a critical conscience which constantly stirs our actions to respond to the “new sons and daughters of the poor and the artisans” in our Latin American society.

PERLA wants to be one more call of the Spirit for the transformation not only of our hearts, but of our educational relations, structures and dynamics. A strong call to build the new face of the Institute in Latin America.

PERLA has a long way ahead, but so is the road of life. This is not a disadvantage, it is another sign of the vitality of the Lasallian Institute in the Region. The future reveals itself to Lasallians in Latin America as an opportunity for imagination and creativity. Among these are hidden many opportunities for the devotion to the project that the Spirit once entrusted to John Baptist De La Salle.

Final Questions.

For reflection and sharing

1. Which elements of the first two parts ('The Scene' and 'Urgent Educational Needs'), have opened your eyes? Is there any reality which you were unaware of and which raises questions for you? Do you find that the proposals for responding to urgent needs are viable and likely to succeed?
2. In Section 4 the six PERLA programmes are described. Based on the way they are set out and explained beforehand, which ones would you favour most?
3. What would you incorporate into your situation (your education centre, the mission or apostolate with which you are entrusted) from what has been set out in this booklet? Would it be worth the trouble exploring some line of action?

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