

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE BROTHERS

**ASSOCIATED WITH THE GOD OF HISTORY**  
**Our Formative Life Journey**

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The Nativity of the Lord

*I give thanks to my God always, remembering you in my prayers, as I hear of the love and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones so that your partnership in the faith may become effective in recognizing every good there is in us that leads to Christ (Philemon 1: 4 - 6).*

Dear Brothers,

Once again Christmas gathers us around the Lord Jesus, who became a child for the love of us. Once again we have the good fortune to show our deep love for him and for all children and young people, in whose faces faith allows us to discover the face of Jesus. The invitation that Paul makes to Philemon we should make our own. It is an invitation to live an active faith in the practice of love; a faith that allows us to discover all that we can do for those whom the Lord has entrusted to us. A faith that, no doubt, should lead us to embrace our formative life journey as a call to embrace a never-ending process to respond each day with greater effectiveness to God's saving plan. It is this God of history, revealed in Jesus Christ, who will *everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2: 4).

May the Lord increase our love and our faith this Christmas and throughout 2007, since in his goodness he wants us to become *servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God* (1 Corinthians 4: 1). Merry Christmas to all, and I hope that the New Year, 2007, the year of our 44th General Chapter, will truly be for each of you, for the Institute and for the Lasallian mission, an *acceptable time, a day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6: 2).

As this year draws to a close, as in previous years, I would like to summarize briefly the events that, on a personal or Institute level, seem to me to be the most notable. I will share these in chronological order. Also, I want to thank the Lord for such enriching and hope-filled experiences.

## **The Visit to ARLEP**

From January 13 to February 24 I had the good fortune to visit the seven Districts of ARLEP (Lasallian Region of Spain and Portugal) in the company of Brother Juan Pablo. During a little more than seven weeks we covered the diverse geography of Lasallian places in Spain and Portugal.

There are many reasons to give thanks to God because he continues to act through the Lasallian ideal in favor of many children and young people and because many adults share our spirituality and our mission in different ways. Also, in a society that has undergone a very rapid social change, there are continuous challenges and concerns. I give thanks to God, especially for the meetings that included practically all the Brothers as they gathered in groups by

areas. With them, I was able to dialogue about the 2005 pastoral letter.

This is a Region that is very well organized and it has many commissions and work teams and a very active and enterprising Visitors' Conference. Currently, they are working on a process of convergence toward a new structure that they are designing with a very broad participation of Brothers and lay persons. Both the District Councils and the Lasallian Educational Mission Councils, which operate in each District and with whom we were able to meet, are of high quality and they do excellent work.

I was struck, in all the Districts, by the programs of technical education. These go by the name of *social guarantee* as well as by other names and they are aimed at helping students in difficulty; I was also struck by some experiences, recent ones, that deal with taking care of immigrants, street children, students who do not do well in school. Some of these experiences are similar to the San Miguel Schools in the United States, the difference being that they do not operate independently but they are part of an already established school.

The Districts have taken very deliberate steps toward shared mission and association. Along these lines, the CEL program for Brothers and lay partners that has been in place for several years is an excellent model of joint formation. At the same time, each District is embracing different experiences in this area. I was delighted to see how, in the various administrative teams and in other teams in which

Brothers and lay partners participate, the concern was not exclusively about mission, but it was also about creating a true community where each person is taken into account and appreciated as an individual and ties of friendship and mutual interest were established. I was fortunate to be able to participate, in several Districts, in the act of association on the part of a group of lay persons and these events were very moving.

It seems to me that the issue of community is the one that is receiving the most importance and attention. Here and there Lasallian Christian communities are emerging with different models and strengths, but all with a very clear purpose of embracing spirituality and mission together and by association. Here, as in other Regions throughout the Institute, the challenge is that the organizational and business-related tasks do not stifle the spirit and the religious expression of a Lasallian educational community.

Pastoral ministry has always received special attention in the ARLEP Region. Current changes in youth culture continually create a certain perplexity and uncertainty, but there is a predominance in searching for new forms that better responds to the reality of today. The meetings that we had with student groups, with other youth groups, with teachers and with those in charge of pastoral ministry, stir up hope and they are an invitation to trust the young and to not be afraid of mentoring them as they grow in faith. The service that has been done over the course of the past fifty years by the Saint Pius X Institute for Catechetical Science has left a deep imprint and it has permitted an ex-

traordinary commitment to the Gospel on the part of Brothers and lay partners.

During the year I had the opportunity to participate in two other activities. In the city of Tarragona I was asked to give the opening address for Holy Week, on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the school there. It was there that I saw for myself the Lasallian and religious spirit of a good number of former students, some from recent generations. It is not always to see this spirit, but I did. During the month of July, in El Escorial, near Madrid, I participated in a Regional meeting on our life of community. This type of meeting, which is held each year on a specific theme during the summer months, is an excellent means of continuing formation for the Brothers from all the Districts.

I cannot overlook the visits I made to the Postulancy and to the Scholasticate in Valladolid and the one to the European novitiate in Madrid. The young people who are embracing these stages of formation offer us great hope, as do other young Brothers in community. So, too, do a good number of young lay people who hold leadership positions in pastoral ministry and who belong to one of the Lasallian Christian communities. They are animated by a deep spirituality and they have an extraordinary ability for dedication to the apostolate.

## **The Signum Fidei Meeting**

In 1993, when I was Vicar General, I was asked to write a few words of introduction to the *Style of Life* document that

had been reformulated with the support of Signum Fidei members from across the world. I wrote that *life is a dynamic reality that is always open to the unexpected from God, to man's creativity, to the movement of the Spirit, and to the unique, unprecedented, and unrepeatable journey of each person. Journeying is one of the most passionate and spiritual human adventures that there is.* I have to recognize that the Signum Fidei movement was a foretaste of the wonderful reality that we Brothers and lay partners are building now, associated for the service of the poor to respond to the needs of the young in a mission that is shared.

From March 20 to April 2 there was an international meeting of the Signum Fidei Fraternity, coordinated by Brother Victor Franco, General Councillor and the adviser of the fraternity. The meeting was a very rich one, in which the movement, now present in twenty-nine countries, was evaluated. Above all, it was a time for planning with a view to putting the movement more and more into the hands of the lay members who make it up.

During those days we were able to see, with great satisfaction, that the distinctive characteristics highlighted for all authentically Lasallian associations by the last General Chapter, were very much in evidence in the Signum Fidei Fraternity. The *faith* that moves them always to keep alive the passion for Christ, as the generating core of their embracing the Gospel, read and lived in light of Lasallian spirituality. The *ardent zeal* that opens them to the needs of their brothers and sisters, which translates into a passion for humanity, especially that humanity that is suffering and is

searching for meaning in their lives. The *fraternity* that leads them to increase a spirituality of communion, to establish reference communities of faith, to establish links of union with the Institute through their Districts and with other developing groups within the Lasallian Family.

The principal task of this meeting was to approve the new Style of Life, which we hope will give new vitality and strength to this Lasallian movement of association.

### **Visit to the District of Lwanga and to the Sector of Djibouti**

At the end of March and the beginning of April I visited the Charles Lwanga District that includes the English-speaking areas of Africa. This visit coincided with the appointment, for the first time in the history of this young District, of an African Brother as Visitor. In addition to spending some time with the novices and scholastics I participated in the first District Council meeting of this new phase. The number of young Brothers and those in formation tells us that the priority for this District ought to be formation and the preparation of formation staff, in particular. We hope that this will happen in the coming years.

I then visited the sector of Djibouti which is part of the District of France, as a continuation of my visit to France which began last year with the visit to the Island of Reunion and to Greece. The three days there were filled with rich and varied experiences. Crossing a country where you can see a few trees and some plants only occasionally had a



deep impact on me since I come from a tropical country. Discovering that only a few foreigners, our Brothers among them, are Christian, was no less striking. However, what I would like to highlight is the spirit of our Brothers who are dedicated body and soul to their mission in a Muslim environment, where a group of poor, young people has the opportunity for technical training. These young people respond with deep gratitude to that dedication and they manifest their happiness boisterously with their traditional dances which they never tire of performing. I was struck by the community prayer. In the small chapel, with the doors open, our Brothers with two volunteers who belong to another group, each day with admirable fidelity, intone the liturgical office, which is a marvelous testimony of their faith. It was also wonderful to see the unity that exists, starting with the Franciscan Bishop, in this small group of the disciples of Jesus.

## **Visit to the District of France**

The visit to this hexagonal country, in the company of Brothers Juan Pablo and Claude, successively, took place from April 15 to May 12. In addition, there was the meeting of the full General Council with the incoming and outgoing Visitors of the District in Montebourg, at the feet of Our Lady of the Star.

Based on the number of Brothers who make up the District of France, it is the largest District in the Institute. As we all know, shared mission with lay partners as well as their formation in the spirit of and for the Lasallian mission has had

exemplary growth in recent years. The District has also been very flexible in the way that it has adapted educational structures to the changing realities of society. I believe that the way sponsorship, quality schools, and the Lasallian spirit of those Lasallian laity in charge of educational centers have been carried out is something to be admired. This is also true of those who belong to various Lasallian leadership councils and teams. I was struck by the testimony of one Lasallian who made his commitment of association in Parmenie during my visit. He shared with us, in his own words, his experience of God.

The same as in ARLEP and in other Regions of the Institute, the young person is clearly the center of the educational system, in the Lasallian educational mission. I experienced this in a special way at many professional schools. In one of them, they showed me, with great pride, a collection of poems written by the students. A sense of humanitarianism was very evident in this collection. In many centers, the different leadership or administrative teams have become true faith communities. The meetings with various student groups in which they shared their concerns reminded me of what I had experienced in other Regions, that is, that in spite of prevailing secularism, young people continue to be open to the transcendent, to spiritual concerns, and to a sense of service. I have a very happy memory of the meeting with primary students at the Francs-Bourgeois in Paris and of their questions.

On a personal level, I appreciate very much the work that has been done in the area of youth ministry, which today is

animated by young people themselves. My participation, along with that of Brother Juan Pablo, in the youth Easter gathering in Parmenie, was an extraordinary experience of great spiritual depth. Along with youth ministry which today is reaching a good number of young people, special importance is being given to what is called the pastoral ministry of life choices, which hopes to be a help for all Lasallians in their different vocations and to encourage especially the Brother's vocation. It was also very inspiring to see all the young French Brothers who are very committed to this field.

A very interesting initiative on the community level is the so-called community poles that allow for a meeting of various communities to share thoughts on a topic, District information, prayer. This helps to keep the focus on the Lasallian mission that is being done in those works where the presence of Brothers is no longer possible.

Another aspect I appreciated very much on the level of the Brothers was the many houses provided for our retired Brothers. These are strategically located throughout France so that the Brothers could have the option of being close to their original roots. These houses are excellent structures that provide excellent nursing facilities and they have wonderful Directors and plans for the future to assure their good running. Liturgies are very well planned and interest in society, the Church, and the Institute is very much alive. Seeing the small services that the Brothers provide for each other was wonderful.

## **150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Brothers in Great Britain**

On July 3, in the wonderful and modern cathedral of Liverpool, with Brother Claude and Brother John Johnston and representatives from the District of Ireland and the Sector of Malta, there was a ceremony commemorating the 150 years of the Brothers and Lasallian works in Great Britain. Many Brothers and lay teachers, students and other members from different educational communities participated in the beautiful liturgical celebration. That morning I had the opportunity to share with the Brothers from the house for senior Brothers in St. Helens, and many other Brothers attended that event as well.

It was August 1, 1855, when nine De La Salle Brothers opened their first school in Chapham, south of London which, after many changes and financial difficulties became St. Joseph's College, Beulah Hill, which still exists today. The Eucharistic Liturgy was very well prepared and young students were very much in evidence in their participation in the choir, in dances, and as readers. Some Brothers, beginning with the Brother Visitor, began by recalling the beginnings of the Lasallian mission and the commitments we are called on to fulfill today for the good of young people, and they made a very explicit invitation to consider the Brother's vocation. The nine young volunteers from St. Cassian's Retreat Center, Kintbury, participated in this event, as did members of the LAMB (Lasallian Mission in Bristol) Community, made up of Brothers and lay persons who are in charge of catechesis in various schools.

## International Symposium of Young Lasallians

As has already been widely reported on our web site, from July 25 to July 30 the second International Symposium of Young Lasallians was held at the Generalate. The central theme of the meeting was: *Mission Possible! A Shared Dream*. It was a wonderful experience in which 150 young people participated, among them 25 Brothers, from 30 different countries. This symposium was prepared by the International Council of Young Lasallians, which is accompanied by Brother William Mann, Vicar General, and by the mixed Italy-ARLEP commission, which did an excellent job.

The very well prepared presentation of topics for discussion, prolonged times for prayer, the visit to Assisi in the footsteps of Saint Francis, with a night vigil before the tomb of the *poverello*, and, especially, the sharing of experiences of the young people about what they are doing in the field of the Lasallian educational mission, particularly in service of the poor, were the most significant moments of the Symposium.

Among others, there were very significant experiences presented from the Philippines, France, and Australia...also, there were concrete commitments presented such as the San Miguel network of schools in the United States, the Indivisa Manent youth movement, the school for peace and life in La Reliquia, Villavicencio, Colombia, the after school neighborhood program in Italy, the Center for Immigrants, CINTRA, in Barcelona, the work with refugees

in Khartoum, Sudan, missionary experiences in Egypt, or the volunteer service in El Salto, Mexico. These experiences are aimed at the poor based on interpreting reality in the light of faith which is embraced within the framework of a strong experience of fraternity.

As I shared with the young people on the final day of the Symposium, what I hope above all that they might contribute to the Lasallian educational mission is that, while living an experience of a God who is always near, they might be a community which is on the way to a future program. That they might make the mission possible by sharing their dreams and that the Lord might not quench their thirst, nor satisfy their hunger, but that he might always urge them on to life, so that others, so that everyone, might have life and have it in abundance. I am strongly convinced that we have much to hope for from our young people and that their contribution to the educational mission is indispensable. Therefore, it is important that they feel that the doors of association for the educational service and the evangelization of the poor are wide open.

## **Unification of the Districts of Central Europe and The Netherlands**

From August 23 to 25, in Denekamp, north of Holland and close to the border with Germany, we met with the Brothers from the District of The Netherlands and representatives with the District of Central Europe to celebrate the unification of these two Districts, since, starting on September 1, Holland became a sector of the District of

Central Europe. I can say that this has been an exemplary process on the part of the two Districts, characterized by great openness and fraternity.

These were three wonderful and well-planned days of prayer, discussion, and living together, to recall the 60 years of the District of The Netherlands. To this end, a book entitled "*Avec foi et zèle*" (With Faith and Zeal) was written by historian José Eijt, and it was presented. The book gathers together the principal events in the life of the District. It is published in two versions: Dutch and French.

Two things in particular struck me as I read the book: the number of local congregations of teaching Brothers in existence already when the Brothers arrived in 1908, which limited the area of operations of those who had recently arrived since they did not have Dutch certificates which were required for teaching; this led the Brothers to devote themselves above all to run welcome centers to care for problematic youth. These had to be left when policies changed. Secondly, I was struck by the extraordinary missionary spirit that many Brothers had as they carried out their mission in the Mideast, in Aruba, or in Cameroon.

## **European Conference of Visitors**

An important Visitors Conference meeting took place from September 21 to 25 in Angers, France. It was important because during this meeting the statutes, establishing one Lasallian Region of Europe (REL), were approved. This new Region incorporates five previous Regions: ARLEP,

France, REBIM, Central Europe, and Italy. The door was also left open for the possible inclusion of the District of the Middle East, possibly as soon as after the next General Chapter. The new Region, REL, began operation on November 1. This is another step the Institute has taken in the process of restructuring in which we are involved to assure greater vitality and more effective viability, at the same time being very attentive to the charismatic and prophetic elements of our vocation as Brothers, and not only to organizational issues. As I said to the Brothers Visitor on that occasion, what we experience in Europe is of interest to the entire Institute, because it is the fruit of socio-cultural transformation that is happening here and in other countries in the northern hemisphere, due to the transition from a post-industrial world to a society of information, communication, and new technology.

This is of interest to everyone because, due to the phenomenon of globalization, what we experience today in Europe will no doubt be the experience of tomorrow on other continents. Therefore, the response that the European Brothers give may be very enlightening in the future for the rest of the Institute. It is about incarnating the Lasallian charism in the new reality that is being lived today in Europe, without yearning for the past, without condemning the present, but taking what is positive and being a counter-cultural force as we face those values that are in opposition to persons and to the Gospel. It is about, in a word, reinventing the future, with the strength of God and our own initiative.



## Centennial of De La Salle in Australia

On the occasion of their centennial, the Brothers from the District of Australia/New Zealand/Papua New Guinea planned a four-day assembly in which more than one-hundred Brothers participated, to recall their roots and to thank the pioneers that made possible the beginning of the Institute in this southern region of the world. I believe that this was the right way to celebrate this event and, along with Brother Councillor Victor Franco, I had the opportunity to participate. I was very impressed by the quality of the prayers, the infectious fraternity of the Brothers, and the seriousness with which the meeting was prepared. The central theme, in harmony with the next General Chapter, was none other than Being Brothers Today.

Being Brothers Today is not a theory. The most fundamental thing is not to create a document or to think that only one model is valid and that it must be imposed on everyone like a corset. Being Brothers Today is a life journey, it points out a way, it is a search and an adventure, it means opening ourselves to the unknown, to share and to look together for guidelines that we find humbly, letting ourselves be amazed by what we discover...A life journey that in Lasallian terms raises some challenges for us that should give a new enchantment about what being Brothers today means:

- The freshness of the centrality of Jesus and of the Gospel in our lives.
- The heartrending cry of humanity, because we are called to be the most human face of the Church, to

give life, and to defend life.

- The strength of the mission, to respond to the hopes of the poor and to put the means of salvation in the reach of the young.
- The witness of consecration, because we experience God and we should be sacraments of his presence.
- The attraction of a spirituality that gives meaning and guides what we do, what we experience, our relationships.
- These challenges are interwoven by the community, our first association, as the transversal axis and as the most typical outcome of our Lasallian journey; which opens us, in turn, to association with all those who want to embrace the Lasallian charism with us, and who want to be instruments of salvation for the young.

## **The International Assembly on Association for the Lasallian Educational Mission**

As you will be receiving the final result of the Assembly soon, I do not want to expand on this too much, but I would like to point out that those of us who had the grace to participate in this meeting embraced it as a moment of intense joy and profound hope. I believe that we are all aware that this was a historic moment that will allow us to assure the future of the Lasallian mission, responding to the needs of the young, especially the poor, by the ministry of human and Christian education which the Lord, through the Church, has entrusted to us.

As an International Assembly we were witnesses of the richness and variety that we are living in the Institute and of the healthy tensions that can help us journey, keeping diversity in mind and without losing sight of unity. The contribution and the sharing of the diverse Regions in this sense were very enlightening, as were the variety of apostolates and the creative responses that Brothers, Sisters, Catechists, Priests, men and women religious from other congregations and lay persons give today to the needs of the young and to the new types of poverty, based on the Lasallian charism.

*The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad indeed (Psalm 126). With those words, at the conclusion of the Assembly, I thanked all those who had participated and all those whom the participants represented. I concluded like this: Yes. The Lord has indeed done, is doing, and I am sure will continue to do great things for us and through us and, therefore, we are glad indeed. We should not tire of giving thanks to the Lord for allowing us to participate in the same charism, in the same mission and in the same spirituality. Throughout the world, on the five continents, the glory of God is made manifest through our weakness in the lives of many children, young adults, through the Lasallian star.*

## ASSOCIATED WITH THE GOD OF HISTORY

### Our Formative Life Journey

*This word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Rise up, be off to the potter's house; there I will give you my message. I went down to the potter's house and there he was, working at the wheel. Whenever the object of clay which he was making turned out badly in his hand, he tried again, making of the clay another object of whatever sort he pleased. Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do to you, house of Israel, as this potter has done? says the Lord. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel (Jeremiah 18: 1 - 6).*

I think it would be difficult to find a more relevant icon that would express what our formative life journey means. The most important thing is to let God act in us and to realize his will in us. This is the ultimate purpose of all formation. We know that his will is that all potential, grace, and gifts given to us might come fully to fruition and that we put them in service of humanity. To let God mold me, to put myself in his hands with trust, to abandon myself to his love, to feel like clay in his hands from the first day of my gestation until the end of my earthly life is an uninterrupted process and a wonderful adventure. This does not mean passivity on my part, because I should respond to

God's action with total, limitless dedication. This dedication has for its purpose nothing other than that He grows and I diminish and that, in the Gospel sense, I lose my life in favor of those who accompany my human journey and those whom the Lord, in his mysterious design of salvation, has entrusted to me.

It is, however, a slow process, with backward and forward steps, and it needs to mature patiently. *I recall the morning when I found a cocoon on the bark of a tree, just when the caterpillar was breaking out of the enveloping threads to become a butterfly. I waited a long time, but it was taking too long and I was in a hurry. Frustrated, I bent down toward it and I tried to help it along by warming it up with my breath. The covering opened, the caterpillar dragged itself out, and I will never forget the horror I felt as I saw it...it was all in vain. In that case, what was needed was patient maturation...My breath had forced the caterpillar to come out of the cocoon all wrinkled up, before its time...I believe that that small cadaver is the greatest weight on my conscience. I understand perfectly well today, that it is a grave sin to force the laws of nature. We should not hurry ourselves, nor lose our patience, but continue on with full trust in the eternal rhythm of things (Kazantzakis).*

Personally, I find this parable to be very significant because it seems to me that it describes very well the deepest sense of the topic I wanted to share with you this year - that of our formative life journey. The point of departure is the historical character of the human being who not only lives in history but who is fulfilled in history. This means that all of life constitutes a process of formation with diverse rhythms

that we must respect. The God of history has put in our hands our own destiny. It is about, therefore, formation that happens in an historical and personal context, at the same time.

This means that we must keep in mind, on the one hand, the period of incessant change in which we live in our globalized world, which demands tireless openness of spirit and heart, as well as the need to be up to date in a world that changes with such rapidity. On the other hand, we need to keep in mind the fact that every person is a being in the process of becoming and, therefore, the formative process itself is never finished. Saint Gregory the Great defined spiritual growth as a transition *from one beginning to another, until the endless beginning of eternal life*. Benjamin Franklin affirmed this when he said: *On the day of my death I will finally finish being born*. In this sense we can never consider ourselves as finished or formed, but we need to feel that we are pilgrims always on a journey. Certainly, it is about a hope that urges us to look ahead and to plan something for an uncertain tomorrow, rooted in our faith that spurs us on toward the eternal future of God. It is really about *asking ourselves in our deepest being, in a concrete way, if the spirit and heart still have a tiny space within us for innovation and for a future beyond the present* (Karl Rahner).

Formation, before being initial or continuing, is a formation that we could call integral, which takes in human beings from gestation until death. It seems to me, therefore, to be more appropriate to talk about a formative life journey. Journey indicates a path, it is a search and an adven-

ture, it opens us to the unknown, in an attitude of humility and it allows us to marvel at what we are discovering... *Thus it will be important that all consecrated persons be formed in the freedom to learn throughout life, in every age and season, in every human ambient and context, from every person and every culture open to be taught by any fragment of truth and beauty found around them. But above all they must learn to be formed by everyday life, by their own community, by their brothers and sisters, by everyday things, ordinary and extraordinary, by prayer and by apostolic fatigue, in joy and in suffering, until the moment of death* (Starting Afresh from Christ, 15.)

As we know very well, this was the process experienced by our Founder as we find it expressed in the Memoir of the Beginnings: *God, Who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, Whose way it is not to force the inclination of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. He did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning* (as quoted in Blain, Book 1).

Rather than focusing, therefore, on what differentiates initial and continuing formation, we ought to focus on what unifies them. They cannot be considered as two different stages but as two moments of only one process. As *Vita Consecrata* states: *Initial formation, then, should be closely connected with continuing formation, thereby creating a readiness on everyone's part to let themselves be formed every day of their lives* (VC 69).

Formation is an integral lifelong **process** which includes the entire person. Among other items, some aspects of this process include:

- a process of faith which is focused on the person and clarified by historical context,
- a process that seeks a systematization of the stages that lead to personal growth and to commitment to the Kingdom,
- an integral process of all the dimensions of the person and, therefore is: gradual, organic, continuous, constantly guided and assessed, highlighting some elements according to the stages and situation of the person,
- a process that takes place in a community where the charism is interpreted and experienced,
- a process that starts from one's own values, family, social, cultural situation, and, therefore, includes personal accompaniment in dialogue and respect.
- a process that discovers the dynamic role of lay persons, young people, and the poor.

Initial and continuing formation should be on the same wavelength. Otherwise, we would lead those whom we are initiating to live a reality for which they have not been formed, which leads to frustration or disenchantment. It is very important, therefore, that Districts have a unified plan of overall formation.

It is, nevertheless, inevitable that there is a certain tension between initial and continuing formation. On the one



hand, existence comes before essence, which means that the characteristics of consecration according to the Lasallian charism will emerge within an apostolic community, which will provide continuing formation. On the other hand, the prefiguring of the essence can determine existence, and in this sense it is initial formation that will inspire a certain way of living our consecration to God, our community fraternity and our apostolic mission.

Today, however, we find a new element that has been gaining strength by leaps and bounds in recent years, the strength of the Spirit. I am referring to shared mission and association. Today we should look at formation from a plural perspective. As the Latin-American Benedictine, Simón Pedro Arnold, says it: *Is it not time to begin to think about several ways to enter into the spirituality of a given Congregation, where you could go from a lay option to a consecrated option, nonetheless embracing a shared, common, family experience? Many Congregations today are exploring these harmonious and complementary ways. The challenge for that search is in constituting a true family of equals, who are in solidarity with their diversity of their specific lifestyles, yet with the same identity. We would not want to fall in the trap of "second-class" men or women religious or Third Orders who "are beggars of the leftovers" from the Congregation. It is about creating a true People of God with charismatic traits, dignity, and common tasks within forms of diverse commitment.*

## **A Philosophical Glimpse**

Today, as never before, human beings have broadened the

horizon of their knowledge in an extraordinary way, but, it would seem, what they have gained in extent, they have many times over lost in depth. The sum of their knowledge does not give a view of the totality, and in facing the universe they often feel the frenzy of emptiness.

In view of this problem, many types of messianism have appeared, as a saving medicine for this *sick animal*, man, to use Hegel's words. Man has believed that he has seen his salvation, more than in others, in the intoxicating journey of science and technology and, more recently, in the virtual world. But such a mathematical way of perceiving, which operates through abstract symbols, such as computer science, which uses connections, are incapable of uncovering man's thirst for knowledge and for his need to know about the ultimate relationship of things.

If we compare the archaic man of yesterday to man today, it seems that the existence of the former might have consisted in some rudimentary technical forms, rotating around a hidden plenitude of ways of expressing many myths; whereas the existence of the latter is just the opposite: technical perfection and sudden work, often rotating around "nothingness."

Bergson asks himself what human civilization would have come to if its point of departure had been the psychological and not the physical, and he tells us that probably progress would have become an end in itself and that it would not have crushed mankind but it would be at the service of his true freedom. According to Saint Bonaventure

mankind finds itself in an intermediate situation between God and things. Situated between two extremes, the soul turns to God and to things. The first is wisdom, the second is science. The two dimensions are necessary for complete self-fulfillment. This gives the impression that man today seems to prefer civilization over culture; to dominate nature and to make progress in the world, to master oneself and to go forward in spirit.

Pascal states that *we know truth not only with reason but also with the heart... Principles are heartfelt, conclusions are deduced... It is the heart that feels God and not reason.* This is what faith is: God is sensitive to the heart and not to reason. On the other hand, we can say that love makes us "feel" truth, disposing our spirit to experience it with greater interiority and more easily. We could say that it is knowledge that is tasted. Saint Thomas tells us that love refers to the object that is loved as to oneself or to something of one's own. In the same sense, Saint Augustine ends up saying that we are what we love.

To truly know something, intelligence is not enough, with its analytical structure that halts movement, nor is instinct, which is unconscious. We need to have a contemplative, intuitive way of looking at things, one that puts us inside an object by a kind of sympathy that destroys the barrier placed between it and us. *In a given landscape, the geographer will show us a specific physical configuration, a soldier will show us a "camp," more or less difficult to defend, an agronomist will show us the "soil," with crops proper to it; only the artist strives to become attached to the landscape itself and,*

*in doing this, he recovers the original and unique features; beyond the abstract sketches on which are superimposed from his respective points of view as engineer, strategist, or geographer, there is still something inimitable that makes the landscape like none other, and it is completely defined when its individuality is expressed (Yankelevich).*

Today we speak of the centrality of the person. It is certain that today as in the past the human being is still a mystery. Our being is a paradox. There are many elements that combat in our inmost being. As creatures we experience many limits; nevertheless, our aspirations and desires are infinite. Though free, our freedom in a certain sense is destroyed once a choice is made. To choose is to give up. On the other hand, along with Saint Paul we experience that we do what we do not want to do, and we stop doing what we want to do. Open to others, our hunger for love is insatiable and our dedication is almost always selfish. Our life is presented as a dramatic struggle, in that many times we are defeated. Greater than the entire universe, by means of our interiority we can reach the visible and the invisible, or we can let ourselves be enslaved, as a new trainee in witchery, by the forces unleashed by ourselves.

It seems to me that this description responds to what each of us is and to the challenges we face. As human beings, full of mystery and paradox, important and in a continual process of being built, we should look on formation as a way, a journey, a vocation from our conception until our death; as a call *to attain to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ* (Ephesians 4: 13), aware that we are

neither pure reason, nor pure brightness, but also emotion, sentiment, instinct, passion, and desire. Therefore, it is about an integral formation that avoids the real anti-human danger: the danger of seeing man as a machine or the danger of seeing man as a beast. Formation that keeps in mind the head, heart, hands, and feet.

The document *Vita Consecrata* invites us to embrace a similar process when it states that *the formation process is not limited to the initial phase. Due to human limitations, the consecrated person can never claim to have completely brought to life the "new creature" who, in every circumstance of life, reflects the very mind of Christ* (VC 69). Typically, when we think about formation we think about the intellect. Therefore, it is striking that the document speaks to us about sentiments. Sentiments express the person, his inner dispositions, his way of looking at life, the desires and the motivations that spur him to action. It is to this level, that of the heart in the biblical sense, where our formative life journey should be directed. As the Central American Jesuit, Juan Hernández Pico, says: *In the new story that is beginning, we will face the world not only with science but also with wisdom, not just with instruments, but also with esthetics, not only from reason, but also from feelings, not just from cold analysis, but also with warm, cordial intuition, not just with strong will, but also with free expression of tenderness.*

## **Our Formation Today**

Our formative life journey, at the same time as it has as its goal to reflect the mind of the Son (VC 69), it also has the

objective of being able to seek and to discern the signs of God in earthly realities (VC 68).

During the Congress on Consecrated Life in November 2004, one of the work groups studied the topic of the thirst for the sacred, and among other things this group told us that *in our world new idols are worshiped that obstruct the worship of the one, true God. There is a global view - especially in opulent societies - of a secular reality and we are wrapped up in a world without transcendence or syncretism, one that is agnostic and functional* (Thirst for the Sacred). The danger of idolatry is not only a temptation from biblical times; it is present in the world today and sometimes inside the Church itself and within our communities. *Also in the Church and within Consecrated Life environmental secularism fosters a deviation into idolatry which is expressed in the worship of means, of the powerful, of institutions, habits, rites, laws, that make conversion to the only one who is absolute and necessary, and to passion for the God of the Kingdom more and more difficult* (Thirst for the Sacred).

On the cultural level, we are living during a time of transition between word and image. Wisdom today is being replaced by excellence. *What is important is to know how to do things and to do them well. To dominate instrumental reason rather than the meaning of life. The hero is no longer the Moses of old, whose people had to hold up his arms so that his intercessory activity would not stop, but Rambo the individual, an expert in all types of martial arts, able to resolve complex problems based on the command of his own profession* (José María Tojeira, S.J.).

As for formation, there is some confusion in the modern world between vocation and profession, and this touches the very heart of our identity. Profession means, above all, competence, effectiveness, productivity, social recognition. Due to reasons of age, infirmity, or retirement, profession has an end or a completion. Vocation, on the contrary, is based on a gift, it is an expression of gratuity, it adds something more, which is difficult to describe, to what a person does and it goes beyond the limits of age, health, or retirement. As Father J. B. Libanio, S.J., tells us: *Vocation and profession are not two separate things but they are two different dimensions of human activity, with distinctive characteristics. The identity of a religious implies a proper relationship between the two, and it feels threatened when profession is placed above vocation.* This language is familiar to us Brothers, since our Founder invites us to make no distinction between the duties of our state and those of our salvation, but he also invites us, in a powerful way, to make God and his call the absolutes of our lives.

One of the dangers we have today is to reduce formation to just the professional aspect, leaving aside our growth in our vocation, which is by far the most important. We must keep this very much in mind during both initial formation and continuing formation. Father Libanio, cited above, in his intervention at the Congress on Consecrated Life, highlighted another trait of our time. If in the past, as Paul VI used to say often, doing was replaced by being, today it seems that being and having have been substituted by appearance. *We are in a marketing society. Appearances direct people's lives. It does not matter what he is or has, but how he appears, that he*

*looks good, even though inside there is an existential vacuum and a feigned possession of goods.* I think that one basic question to ask, before beginning an initial formation program, is the question on the ultimate objective for doing so. Is it about growing as a person, as a religious, as a teacher, as a Brother, or is it rather about a way of having in order to control, or is it simply a matter of appearances?

Benedict XVI, in an audience for the Superiors and Vicars General of the two Unions, men and women, recognizing the fact that Religious Life today is more evangelical, more ecclesial, and more apostolic, warned us also that *the secularized culture has penetrated the mind and heart of not a few consecrated persons, who understand it as a way to enter modernity and a modality of approach to the contemporary world. As a result, in addition to an undoubted thrust of generosity capable of witness and of total giving, consecrated life today knows the temptation of mediocrity, of middle-class ways and of a consumeristic mentality* (Audience of May 22, 2006).

Zygmunt Bauman, in his book entitled *Liquid Love. About the Frailness of Human Bonds*, presents, very realistically, some of the traits of our world today. Starting with love and differentiating it from desire, he describes the reality that we readily live today. For love, any kind of distance, not matter how small, is seen as intolerable, because it is in the nature of love to unite, fuse, and identify. Desire, on the contrary, is eager to consume. In reality, rather than desire, what should be talked about is to *feel like*. To *feel like* cannot assure neither fidelity nor commitment because what that seeks is to repeat experiences in accord with where the



feeling leads. Love involves stable or solid personal relationships, to *feel like* involves *liquid bonds* that can be easily erased or changed, forgotten about or repeated according to what I like and without looking in our own eyes.

Today there is more and more importance being given to what we could call distance relationships or virtual proximity. But, as Bauman says, *the advent of virtual proximity makes human connections more regular but at the same time more superficial, more intense and briefer. Connections tend to be too superficial and brief to be real bonds. In contrast to human relationships...connections are concerned only about the fact they have been generated and they leave those involved in them safe from outbursts and they are protected from any kind of commitment beyond the time and the topic of the message being sent or read.* Bauman's conclusion is that today it is more difficult to love one's neighbor because more and more we create barriers and we devise ways to communicate with one another by remote control. We could add to this that the culture of fear in which we live makes us protect ourselves and keep our distance from those who are different.

The film *Crash*, which won three Oscars last year, corroborates this. It shows, in a natural way, racial and ethnic discrimination, distrust, and fear to relate in one of the large cities in North America. In that city, whites, Afro-Americans, Iranians, Koreans, and Latinos, find it difficult to embrace integration and tolerance due to their own mutual prejudice. Their lives become intermingled in unlikely ways over the course of a 24-hour period, through chance encounters. The second part of the film, which is marked by

several scenes that show some breaks in the sensitivity and attitudes of the persons involved, opens some opportunities for hope and it seems to point toward a way out of such sadness and misunderstanding.

Here also, children of our own time, we Brothers can let ourselves be swayed by these influences and opt for a type of formation that promotes understanding. The Congress on the Consecrated Life invited us to embrace a double passion - that for God and that for humanity. Passion means closeness, fire, commitment. As Brothers we are called to be sacraments of *horizontal* relationships in a society which they tempt toward the vertical dimension, towards seeking the first position, and in a world that, we have just seen, favors connections at a distance. Our formative life journey should enable us to be witnesses of incarnated love, through a spirituality of communion and to promote on the mission level a world that is more human, where all feel that they are loved by the Father and are called to be brothers and sisters. Fraternity is our way of going to God and it is the best way to express love for our neighbor.

## **SOME ASPECTS OF OUR FORMATIVE LIFE JOURNEY**

### **Our Formative Life Journey and Personal Growth**

It seems to me that the biblical icon that best describes what our formative life journey means on a personal level is

the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in which he invites him to be born again. In fact, as we have seen, being formed is a lifelong process which means being born many times over. *“In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said, “How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?” Jesus answered, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it pleases, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit”* (John 3: 3 - 8).

All of Chapter 6 of the Rule is based on this perspective, and article 100 presents the life of the Brother as a journey punctuated by God’s calls: *By faith the Brother recognizes that his life consists in a succession of calls from God to which he continues to respond.* Our formative life journey is a process that is always open. This is completely contrary to the notion that initial formation forms us so that later we will use up the abundance and end up empty.

This idea of being born again, this response to God’s calls is an essential element of our formation; deep down, it means letting ourselves be transformed by God. It is a task that is certainly filled with risks but also with promise. Instead of psychological knowledge it assumes an availability to go back to our inner selves to listen to the God who is with us

and to have a similar experience to that of Saint Augustine: *I looked for you outside and you were inside*. This includes using all our strength to be *I myself*. We cannot do this task with our strength alone but we can only achieve it with the grace of God. This task has nothing to do with escaping, but it involves interior, calm, and serene commitment.

This life journey is unpredictable and personal. We do have, however, three fundamental certainties that encourage us: God's unconditional love to whom we have consecrated ourselves, the mission of service to brothers and sisters, and community, fraternal support. *For this reason the Brother is invited to be open each day to the presence of the living God in such a way that he discovers it, and lives it in his mission, his consecration, and his community life (Rule 100)*. In a more practical plan, the *Rule* tells us: *Superiors and communities strive to provide each Brother with the conditions and the means most suitable to develop his spiritual, theological, and professional formation (Rule 101)*.

Both in the letters of Saint Paul as well in those of Saint Peter there is a central idea that is often repeated. Each of us is a bearer of a gift, a gift from God for others. That gift, just as the talents in the parable, cannot remain unproductive. The essential thing is to make that seed bear fruit, to make that potential real, to share that gift. This is one of the principal purposes of our formative process. Saint Paul speaks to us of *the grace which God has bestowed upon me* (Galatians 2: 9); of *the grace of God given to me* (1 Corinthians 3: 10). With regard to others, he states: *Indeed, I wish everyone to be as I am, but each has a particular gift from God,*

*one of one kind and one of another* (1 Corinthians 7: 7); this idea is also expressed when he speaks to us of the manifestation of the Spirit in each person: *To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit...But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.* (1 Corinthians 12: 7 - 11). Saint Paul also invites Timothy, and in doing so he invites each of us to *stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands* (2 Timothy 1: 6) and he asks that *the gift you have not be neglected* (1 Timothy 4: 14).

Saint Peter, in an even clearer form, says: *As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace* (1 Peter 4: 10). The question that we need to ask ourselves is: What is my gift and how can I make it grow and share it? At the same time, we need to make our own Paul's advice: *But each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light* (1 Corinthians 3: 10 - 12). The most wonderful thing about this unique gift that God has given each of us is that the more we share, the more we have, so that the best way to make it grow is to give it without measure.

In the Meditations for the Feasts of Saint Peter and for Saint Paul, the Founder makes a wonderful reflection on the gifts received by each of them and how they made them bear fruit. In the meditation for Saint Peter he sees an icon of the spirit of faith and in the one for Saint Paul he sees an

icon of the spirit of zeal. In looking at Saint Peter's faith, he asks us: *Do you have a faith that is such that it is able to touch the hearts of your students and inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you could perform and the one that God asks of you, for this is the purpose of your work* (Meditation 139.3). As the Founder looks at Saint Paul's zeal he reminds us that *It is God, by his power and very special goodness, who has called you to give the knowledge of the Gospel to those who have not yet received it. Do you look upon yourselves, then, as ministers of God? Do you fulfill the duties of your work with all possible zeal, and as having to give an account of it to him?* (Meditation 140.2).

On the personal level, we cannot reduce our formation to just the programs that are offered to us or that we might take advantage of, no matter how important they might be. The privileged place for our formative life journey is most importantly in day-to-day living, each day with its times for personal and community prayer, Eucharist and the Word, with its times for reading and study, for meeting Brothers or young people, the poor, during our apostolic work, of facing reality... In other words, our formative life journey takes place more on the level of living than on the level of knowledge.

## **Our Formative Life Journey and Fraternal Life in Community**

On the community level our formative life journey should help us to grow as persons and as Brothers in the Lord and to give that unique gift which the Lord has given us and

that no one could carry out in our place. If we fail to do this, we will have left a void in our community and in the world. Like Saint Paul, when he speaks of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, formation should lead us to discover, to grow, and to give that our own gift to the other members of the community. This is the invitation so beautifully expressed in our Rule: *The Spirit of love who dwells in each of the Brothers is what creates the unity in their community. Animated by the Spirit, the Brothers build community by the joyful gift of themselves for the service of others (Rule 49).*

Therefore, it is important to think about an *evangelical* community such as that of the Founder and the first Brothers, where our personal commitment to God is done in the midst of the community, in such a way that our commitment to God is influenced by Brothers with whom we also commit ourselves and to whom we also consecrate ourselves.

Convinced that it is Jesus who calls us to follow him in community in order to, in community, proclaim and build up the Kingdom in the history of the children and young people whom we educate and evangelize, always aware of those who are far from salvation.

We are aware, too, that the communion achieved by a community is already the first mission, in terms of its witnessing that the utopia of the Kingdom is achievable. The *Declaration* tells us: *The Brother specifies his determination to work in the service of persons for the glory of God by giving himself to a community that is totally dedicated to the Kingdom of God: witnessing to its presence in the world, announc-*

*ing it to people everywhere, serving the cause of its coming, and promoting its growth in the world (Declaration 13.3).*

Jesuit Father José Antonio García, in his book *Hogar y Taller* (Home and Workshop), presents four charisms to us, indispensable for any community to be a small people of God, determined in the task of building and being bearers of the Kingdom of God. He tells us that to keep this task moving, and for it to be creative the charism of the *Prophet*, the *Singer*, the *Healer*, and the *Leader* are all needed. These different charisms can help us to discover better the gift that each of us is called to place at the service of the community, whether this be at the local, District, Regional, or Institute level.

## **THE PROPHET**

There is no movement without prophets. A community without a prophetic charism loses its ability to analyze the present and, above all, to deal with the future of God in a Utopian manner. The prophetic sense is what the Rule speaks about: *Dedicated as it is to the apostolic ministry of education, the community realizes that its mission needs constantly to be discovered. Accordingly, the community reappraises its goals and methods with a view to coming closer to the spirit of the gospel. It does this by reexamining the pastoral effectiveness of its activity (Rule 51).*

We could ask ourselves: Why is the idea of prophecy so important in a community? The religious community wants to be a kind of *shock therapy* for the world, a treatment that



boldly brings to light the reality of a society far from God, of children whose rights are not respected, of young people who do not find meaning in their lives, of lives that are threatened more and more each day, of the new types of poverty. Without the prophetic element the community becomes amorphous, it does not know exactly why it exists, it loses its orientation and the meaning of the mission, it is content to repeat the past.

The Founder, as he meditated on the topic of community, presents to us the need for the charism of the *prophetic* in the community, especially in its opposition to the worldly spirit. *Notwithstanding the disregard for the Rule in communities, God always keeps in them faithful servants who preserve their spirit. He always reserves there to himself for that purpose some who, as he told Elias, do not bend their knee before Baal, that is they are on their guard against the spirit of the world, and they observe their rules and the practices of their community as well as they can* (Meditation 77.3). In commenting on the words of Saint Paul, *If I were pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Jesus Christ* (Galatians 1: 10), the Founder says: *Since it is a necessity, according to Jesus Christ and to Saint Paul, not to please people of the world and even instead be hated by them, you should do nothing with the intention of pleasing them. In addition, the habits and views of the people of the world are quite different from those you ought to have* (Meditation 75.2).

## **THE SINGER**

As we journey, as we try to shape our community and personal stories and the story of the world in accord with the

Gospel, there are happenings and events that deserve to be sung. It is important to grasp the signs of life, the seeds of the Kingdom already present in our story, the positive values of our society and those of the young.

As we face tiredness and experience the enormous disproportion between invested effort and harvested results we need to discover God's work which takes root in mysterious ways. It is important not to forget the Africa proverb which you already know: *The old tree that is cracking makes more noise than the jungle that is growing.*

Here is where *song* comes into play. Those Brothers who are able to grasp and to sing about the salvation that already exists among us in all kinds of friendship that is growing, in the Kingdom that is appearing, in patience that is resisting, in the charism that is shared, in the faith that grows and matures, in new vocations that are budding, in the service of young people towards the most needy, in the fight for justice, peace, ecology... The Kingdom of God is a horizon which is always unfinished, but it is also a presence inside and outside of the community.

This disposition is very important in a community since, as Harvey Cox puts it, *a festive celebration without political vision becomes insipid, but a political vision without the festive dimension, becomes dangerous.* To celebrate, just like that, not being aware of the reason why, is lacking in meaning and is childish. To be tense about the future, through a radical commitment, without enjoying the effort and what it is producing, creates hard men who are incapable of smiling or tenderness.

The charism of the *song* we find, in Lasallian terms, on the last two Meditations of the Founder for the Time of Retreat: *Another reward in this life which they receive who work for the salvation of souls, is the consolation they have to see God served well by those whom they have instructed, and that their work has not been useless but served to save those whom they were called upon to instruct...It is indeed a great joy for you to instruct your disciples about the truths of the Gospel solely for the love of God. It was this thought that made the Teacher of the Nations always find consolation, and according to the testimony he has given, filled him with overflowing joy in the midst of his afflictions* (Meditation 207.2; also see 208.3).

## **THE HEALER**

In any human group there are people who are ill. Also in community, all of us to a greater or lesser degree carry deep wounds in our soul. A community that does not admit the sick is not Christian; but the issue is to see who can lend them a hand. Neither a prophet nor a singer is going to get a sick person going again. It is not a time for singing and even less a time for casting blame. What the sick need is for a doctor to cure them.

We are all aware of that type of Brother whose principal contribution to the group consists in knowing how to approach each person silently, and to intuit without asking many questions where the hurt is and to try to cure it all the while giving great quantities of trust in themselves and in the work that God wants to do through them. This is about a saving presence. The Rule invites us to make our

communities homes and each day to renew friendships, esteem, trust and mutual respect (*Rule 54*) and to pay special attention to the young Brothers (*ibid.*) and to those senior Brothers, the sick, discouraged, or those undergoing trials, so that they all may feel supported by the love of Christ (*Rule 56*).

The Founder describes this community charism in this way: *This is what persons whose temperament is kind and moderate easily achieve. They gain entry so well into the hearts of those with whom they speak and relate that they win them over little by little and obtain from them whatever they desire* (Meditation 65.2). We can apply with even greater reason what the Founder applies to our relationship with our disciples: *You must consider the obligation you have to win their hearts as one of the principal means to lead them to live in a Christian manner. Often reflect that if you fail to use this means, you will drive them away from God instead of drawing them to him* (Meditation 115.3).

## THE LEADER

Here we are referring to the service of authority or leadership ministry. As the Guide for Brother Directors says: *A Brother among his Brothers, the Director of a community is aware that his mission is truly a ministry entrusted to him by God, in order to promote communion, individual growth and an increase in apostolic zeal among his Brothers* (GHD, page 7). The Founder also tells us: *Superiors have the right to command us only because they speak in the name of Jesus Christ and as representatives of his person. We should obey them only*

*because, according to the expression of Saint Paul, they labor for the perfection of the saints and the building up of the Body of Jesus Christ, who is our Head. Thanks to the submission rendered to him in his ministers, he joins and unites all the parts of his body in proper proportion to make one and the same body (Meditation 72.2).*

Such is the sense of the Community Annual Program which, in accord with what Brother Jaume Pujol tells us, is more in the order of *“knowing how to live”* than in *“knowing how to do.”* *Arranging for periods of prayer has no meaning if it does not result in the development of a communal spirit of prayer. Distribution of responsibility for apostolic activities is meaningful only if the members of the community teach one another how to identify the needs of youth and the means to answer such needs. Organization of the community’s internal life makes sense only if we are concerned about getting to know, about accepting, and about helping each other (Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, Circular 410, page 61).*

To promote the above is up to all of the Brothers but, in a special way, it is up to the Brother Director. Not for reasons of order and control should community life be defined in terms of friendship, but precisely for reasons of clarity. It is about helping the members of the group to internalize and embrace the Gospel values that unite them, those values in virtue of which we have decided to live together: a spirit that encourages us, a mission that drives us. For this to happen, the community needs to keep in mind various dimensions, to which the Brother Director must be very sensitive and which he must nurture:

- A human dimension of reciprocal understanding and friendship.
- A Christian dimension of co-participation in the faith.
- A religious dimension in support of our Consecrated Life.
- A Lasallian dimension in embracing the charism.
- An apostolic dimension in planning and carrying out our ministry.
- A financial dimension in transparency and sharing of goods.

It is important to be aware of the complementarity of the charisms and to recognize the charism of others, to allow ourselves to be recognized in our own charism, and to place all of them together to build up a community that will be a sacrament of the God's love in the world. In this way we make real what is described to us in the document *Fraternal Life in Community: In this way, religious community becomes the place where we learn daily to take on that new mind which allows us to live in fraternal communion through the richness of diverse gifts and which, at the same time, fosters a convergence of these gifts towards fraternity and towards co-responsibility in the apostolic plan* (39).

## **Our Formative Life Journey and the Word of God**

The Word of God, when it is read, contemplated, and embraced is one of the fundamental nourishments throughout our lives. The Word constitutes the very heart of spiritual

life which, thanks to Vatican II, religious life has recovered. Jesus opened the eyes of the disciples on the road to Emmaus as he explained the Scriptures to them. His message in Nazareth was inspired in a text of Isaiah and, close to his death, his conversation with Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor made reference to the Law and the Prophets. This is most likely why Saint Paul wrote this to Timothy: *All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3: 16 - 17).

Scripture is an essential dynamic in our lives as Brothers, as the Rule tells us: *To acquire and live by the spirit of their Institute, the Brothers find endless sustenance in studying, meditating and sharing among themselves the Word of God. They have a profound respect for Holy Scripture, especially the Gospel, "their first and principal Rule"* (Rule 6).

It is worth stopping here for a moment to consider what the Founder proposed to us in the Rule of 1718, which gave origin to Article 6 in the current Rule: *The Brothers in this Society shall have the utmost respect for Holy Scripture and, to show this, they shall always carry with them a copy of the New Testament, and they shall faithfully read a part of it every day, respect and venerate the divine words it contains, and they shall look upon it as their first and principal Rule.*

It is interesting to recall that in a study made by French Brother Adrien Roche, he provides some provisional data for us about the number of times the Founder cites the

Bible: he cites the Old Testament 899 times and the New Testament 3,972 times. Among these citations, 1,165 of them are from the writings of Saint Paul and so it is easy to see the influence that Saint Paul had on the Founder's spirituality and on his life. Therefore, it is not surprising that he often invites us to know and to interiorize the Word of God, as one of the most important elements of our formation and as one of the apostolic efficacies of our ministry. This is what he tells us, for example, in the meditation on Saint Mark: *Are you careful to learn thoroughly the holy maxims contained in this saint's Gospel, and to meditate on them often, so that you may be able to inspire them in those for whom you are responsible? Your first care for them should be to make sure they grasp fully the doctrine of the holy apostles, to give them the spirit of religion, and to make them practice what Jesus Christ has left us in the holy Gospel* (Meditation 116.2).

This rich, Lasallian heritage has become a tradition which, far from losing its validity, is getting even stronger. The Declaration tells us: *The wealth of the Institute consists in the Brothers who comprise it; its apostolic effectiveness depends on how well prepared they are. For that reason, everything ought to be done to enable them to work with confidence and optimism. That means that they must be provided with the training in Scripture and theology that is indispensable for their mission* (Declaration 38.5). The Congress on Religious Life, for its part, told us that thorough training in Bible studies can help us effectively challenge fundamentalism, extreme spirituality and excessive devotions that threaten us today.

The Word of God introduces us to a true school of prayer.



To pray with the Word is, first of all, to let myself be permeated and imbued by it, to welcome it. God speaks to me and I listen to God with an open heart. Like Mary, who kept all these things in her heart (Luke 2: 51). I look at myself in the mirror of that Word, I compare my life with the Word as it is read or heard. To pray with the Word is to let my prayer spring up. Peace, joy, praise, gratitude, sorrow, a desire to change: everything that springs up in my heart I say to the Lord simply and spontaneously. To pray with the Word is to proclaim it. I feel that the Word that is prayed is not only for me, but I have to share it, I have to give it life. In this sense the liturgical year offers us extraordinary, daily means for our formation. *In a very unique way consecrated persons learn to allow themselves to be molded by the liturgical year in which the mysteries of the life of the Son of God are relived in order to start afresh from Christ and from his death and resurrection everyday of their lives (Starting Afresh from Christ, 15).*

With the decrease in the number of Brothers today, one of the dangers that is affecting some Districts is the temptation to reserve some administrative positions for Brothers. Some young Brothers seem to think that the most important objective of their academic training is to occupy those posts. To continue to give priority to solid biblical training can be an incentive for many Brothers to remain actively committed to catechesis and pastoral ministry, as the Founder intended. *You have been appointed by God to succeed the holy apostles in teaching the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and in confirming his holy law in the minds and hearts of those whom you instruct when you teach catechism, which is your principal function (Meditation 145.3).*

For that reason the Rule, recognizing this intuition from our origins, tells us: *The Brothers consider that their “principal function” consists in the work of evangelization and catechesis whereby they contribute to growth in faith of those who have been baptized and to the building up of the ecclesial community. This conviction plays a dominant rule in the formation of the Brothers as well as in the choice of the assignments for which they will be prepared (Rule 15).* This would also apply to Brothers who carry out their ministry in the midst of other religions, since we know that interreligious dialogue and human formation already constitute an extraordinary means of evangelization.

## **Our Formative Life Journey and the Founder**

We should embrace our formative life journey in light of the life journey of our Founder. This means, above all, to be faithful to his spirit, to his specific intentions, and to his spiritual and pedagogical thinking. As Brother Michel Sauvage said so many times, fidelity does not mean repetition, nor does it mean looking upon the Founder as an idol, an oracle, a refuge, an alibi, or an arsenal. We should consider him, rather, as an inspirer who invites us to embrace his charism with the freedom of God’s children and in response to the needs of our time.

One of the major concerns that I have regarding this is that during the time of initial formation, especially during the Scholasticate, due to secular studies, there is not always sufficient time given to young Brothers for them to make an in-depth study of our roots nor is there time for them to

study deeply our origins and Lasallian spirituality. What is needed is to make an empirical and committed reading which does not separate the writings about the Founder's life journey and those of the first Brothers, one that integrates the spiritual with the pedagogical and that allows us to enlighten our own life journey in light of the Founder's own.

The *Rule* reminds us of the spiritual life journey embraced by the Founder and it invites us to enter, following his example, into a process of human, spiritual, and apostolic growth throughout our lives. *In response to the design of God in his regard, Saint John Baptist de La Salle transformed his entire life into a spiritual journey of ever increasing faith. He was concerned to offer to the young men who joined him the best possible spiritual guidance. Following his example, the Brothers are invited to involve themselves over the course of their entire lives in the process of growing towards human, spiritual an apostolic maturity (Rule 81).*

As we know, it is important to read the Meditations which the Founder left us in terms of an autobiography. Based on this reading, we can better understand his own life journey and discover his thought. I think that during the Founder's life, when he invites us to *abandon ourselves to God's Providence, like a man who puts himself out on the high seas without sails or oars* (Meditation 134.1). This was the life experience expressed by Charles Péguy in these words: *Please, be like the man who is in a boat on a river and who does not constantly row, but sometimes he lets himself be carried by the current.* The current of a God who guides the history of men.

For us, Saint John Baptist de La Salle is our prayer master. The Explanation for the Method of Making Mental Prayer and the Meditations for the Time of Retreat are a family treasure. In good times and in bad times the Founder invites us to be interior men, able to recognize that the Spirit dwells within us, to discover that same Spirit in our Brothers, in children and young people, in the world and in the Church. There is no doubt that the Founder “*continues to inspire and sustain*” (Rule 149) our life of prayer. Above all, however, the Founder must be for us a witness, whose spiritual life journey as a man of faith, captivated by God and committed to his saving work, contemplation in action, who recognized the Lord’s living and acting presence in his own history, always available to the activity of the Spirit, who leads us on our own journey *to accomplish all our actions by “the guidance of God, by the movement of his Spirit and with the intention of pleasing him”* (Rule 6) through the ministry of Christian education.

Another aspect which the Founder stressed with regard to the formation of the Brothers was that the Brothers should be prepared to carry the Gospel to the world of education. This is a recurring theme in many of his meditations. He tells us, for example: *You are obliged to announce the truths of the Gospel every day. Practice those that are required for all Christians before you undertake to teach them to others... Be assured, however, that you will make this effective for others only insofar as it has produced its effect in you. See that it does, and without delay* (Meditation 138.3). Therefore, it is not about a bookish experience, but an authentic, personal spiritual experience: *You are in a work that requires much zeal,*

*but this zeal would be of little use if it did not have its proper effect; this, however, it cannot have unless it is a product of the love of God living in you* (Meditation 171.2).

This will be possible, he tells us, *if you devote yourselves to know thoroughly the Christian doctrine that you have to teach to your students, and if you work to inspire them with piety through your sound teaching* (Meditation 174.1). He adds that God makes use of their *natural intelligence and what they acquire through humane learning to bring them to himself* (Meditation 175.1). Oftentimes the Brother is obliged to take the place of parents, which demands extraordinary preparation: *At times you have to teach children who do not know God, because they have been brought up by parents who do not know him themselves. Strive to know God so well through reading and prayer that you may be able to make him known to others, and make him loved by all those to whom you have made him known* (Meditation 41.3).

The Founder gives us very concrete means for formation: *You must for this purpose not only know these truths in general, but it is also important that you have such a grasp on all of them that you are able to expand on them sufficiently to make them understood clearly and in detail by your disciples* (Meditation 198.1); *you yourselves should be entirely filled with God and burning with love for his holy law, so that your words may have their proper effect on your disciples* (Meditation 100.2); *therefore, study your catechism, read good books, apply yourself to prayer with fervor, and according to the spirit of your Institute mortify your mind and senses* (Meditation 153.1). In this final meditation he gives us a firm warning:

*You must learn the truths of religion thoroughly by study, for ignorance in you would be criminal, since it would cause ignorance in those who are entrusted to you (Meditation 153.1).*

When he was already retired in Rouen in 1718, one year before his death, the Founder showed the importance he gave to initial formation in the Novitiate stage (which included just about the entire preparation for the Brother before he went to the schools since during the second year the future Brother was initiated in pedagogical tasks with practical exercises for class and teaching catechism), he wrote to Brother Bartholomew, the Superior General: *I write to you, my very dear Brother, as I am surprised to see the present state of the novitiate: two or three novices who are being formed in nothing at all, and they observe the Rule no better than if they had just entered the house. Furthermore, there are five postulants who are dominated by their passions and they have practically no good example to follow. The new novice master is himself not trained for his charge, and he does not know what he should be doing, nor what the novices should be doing...I do not think that I have ever seen, at least for a very many years, a similar novitiate in the community. And you intend to open other establishments with this! (CI 4, 1 - 4).*

We do know, however, of the importance given to spiritual retreats and to the Assemblies of the Brothers, as being privileged means for formation, as well as the importance of the personal accompaniment of each Brother by means of the response to the monthly letters that he sent (cf. Maillefer 82, CL 6).

## Our Formative Life Journey, the Young and the Poor

One of the priority goals of our formative life journey is the mission. We are not formed, first of all, for personal self-fulfillment or to think ourselves superior to others, taking on titles and knowledge or to occupy places of privilege. Nor is it about an exercise in narcissism, but fundamentally it is one of service. We know that our faith, according to the Gospel, is not measured in personal perfection, but in commitment (Matthew 25). Such should also be the ultimate purpose of our formative life journey, as the Rule requires of us: *the Brother development their natural talents and their professional skills so as to enable others to benefit from them* (Rule 32b).

Our mission, according to the Rule, is to procure the *human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor* (Rule 3). Our mission consists in helping to keep alive the search for solutions to the existential concerns of the young we educate. Our mission is to help them acquire an appropriate hierarchy of values that gives meaning to human life. Our mission should promote the development of the interior person, of gratuitous love, of generous commitment. Our mission is to see to it that young people integrate reason and emotion in their person; sentiments and instincts, the will and frailness. Our mission starts from poor, young people about whom we are particularly sensitive so that they might live with dignity; our mission should open our eyes to the new kinds of poverty in order to search for creative and effective responses. Our mission

is to carry the Gospel as we announce it or dialogue about it in the world of education.

Young people and the poor must be the obligatory reference point of our formative life journey. They, in a certain way, are our *founders*, because we came into existence to respond to their needs. For them, we must continually renew our educational and evangelizing mission. For them, we must promote a kind of formation that permits us to be enculturated in their world as well as to be inter-culturally aware in their service.

Young people are new news for the world, but we should ask ourselves how to make the Good News of Jesus be good news for them, so that they might be open to the saving message that God offers them through our mediation. The first thing is to know and be empathic about their world. The Uruguayan sociologist Ernesto Rodríguez, Director of the Latin-American Youth Center, recommended in a talk he gave in 2004 at the El Salvador Jesuit University that *besides attending workshops and seminars, and reading articles that may be the product of various research having to do with the young, or being dependent on recent reports on the topic of youth, it is appropriate to begin to see, with a positive attitude, the programs and the television channels that they prefer, to attend events that bring together large numbers of youth in order to understand what they offer or what they provide to them, to listen to the music that they enjoy and to realize the messages that are brought up by these means, to read the poems they write..., in short, to try to approach their world amicably to understand what they are like and why they act differently*



*from their elders (Diakonia, July - September 2005).*

With regard to the poor, the Rule highlights for us, inspired in the Founder, how the poor, for whom the Institute came into existence, must always be kept in mind in our formation programs. *Following the example of their Founder, the Brothers, as persons and in community, look upon their intellectual and spiritual development in terms of a progressive conversion to the poor (Rule 40b).* The growing seriousness of poverty constitutes a challenge that calls into question and clarifies our mission and, therefore, our formation. This is why the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter recommended to the Visitors: *The Brothers Visitors invite the Brothers on sabbatical or other similar programs of renewal to include in their program some involvement with the less fortunate (Circular 435, page 25).* In addition, the Rule requests those in charge of Regions and Districts to plan for *the development of their apostolic works which will make direct service to the poor more and more their effective reality. For that reason, such a plan includes ways to recruit or train replacements and so permits Brothers to be released for such service (Rule 40a).*

During our formative life journey the poor should be our teachers. First of all, because in Jesus salvation has been revealed as the mystery of poverty and we cannot understand Jesus or his mystery unless we start from the poor, who are a privileged place for its manifestation. *God has expressed in Jesus the culture of poverty...In order to understand Jesus, the universe of the poor is the privileged place to look upon him from there...In addition, the poor will be our teachers and formators in generosity that is shared and in the frailty and lack*

*of security in which they live. The poor will be for us also, as they were for Jesus, the privileged targets of our mission* (Benjamín González Buelta, S.J.).

Therefore, the *progressive conversion to the poor* should be a criterion of or formative life journey. This ought to allow us to have a critical view of reality, to make ourselves sensitive to the needs and the suffering of the poor and oppressed, to discover the root causes of poverty, to promote justice, to prepare ourselves to serve them (*Rule 14*). We are aware that such service assumes love but also competence. *Competence without love is like hands without a heart, but love without competence is like a heart without hands* (Calisto Venrame, M.I. Camillani). Aware of the invitation the Rule makes to us, each Brother is asked, urged on by zeal and the mind of Christ the servant, to constantly seek *to improve their competence, the quality of their relationships, the witness of their life, and the vigor of their faith* (*Rule 21*).

It also must not be forgotten that the Father, no matter our age, always encourages us to give of ourselves and to surrender our life for the salvation of the world, in an ever-changing **mission**. In accord with the Rule, when it speaks about Brother who, for reasons of age or other limitations, are obliged to decrease the pace of their mission, still *motivated by faith and zeal, they search for new ways to exercise their ministry as a response to a new call from God. Accordingly, they are supported by the Brothers of the community and by the superiors as they seek to accomplish some apostolic task with their capacities and in keeping with the purpose of the Institute* (*Rule 16d*).

## Our Formative Life Journey and Association

We Brothers and lay partners form ourselves in order to share the same ecclesial ministry and together to incarnate the same charism, each of us starting from our specific identity. Formation for shared mission must be a priority, keeping in mind the Lasallian style of education: preference for the poor, the evangelizing dimension, the fact that the students takes center stage, the spirit of fraternity, and existential unity between faith and life. The 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter tells us: *The initial and continuing formation of the Brothers takes into account the shared mission. The development of an up-to-date theology of lay people and the life of consecration enables all to understand shared mission, to recognize their contribution to it and thus take on real responsibility directly related to their specific identities in the partnership* (Circular 435, page 33).

Years before the General Chapter of 1993, our Rule made a concrete call to Brothers and lay partners to take seriously their process of formation, in function with the common mission: *In order to fulfill their mission, the Brothers, together with those who work with them, undertake a periodic evaluation and revision of their educational programs. Both groups provide as well for their personal and continuing formation* (Rule 13d). There is no doubt that today this language may seem inadequate or at least incomplete to us. Not only “both groups,” but together with mutual support. Today we have joint continuing formation centers for Brothers and lay colleagues in some Regions of the Institute and we have had two CIL sessions on the international level for the for-

mation of Brothers and lay colleagues, as requested by the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter. Both experiences had excellent outcomes. On the level of initial formation, new paths are being forged which will undoubtedly develop progressively in the future.

It is wonderful to see these groups representing the diversity of the Region or the international character of the Institute and of the Lasallian Family, united in the same *vocation to live in accord with the charism of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, starting from the particular identity as a Brother or as a lay person. It is about being aware, as the Founder expresses it in his Meditations for the Time of Retreat, that we are cooperators and ambassadors of Christ and his Church, guardian angels of our students...It is about embracing our respective vocation as a call from God to build up his Kingdom through human and Christian education and being inspired in Lasallian values. It is about embracing a formative life journey that allows us, each of us, to continue being instruments of salvation for the young, especially for those who need us most of all.

It is about discovering God's saving plan in events and in persons, especially the poor, enlightened by God's Word and, like the Founder, always aware of and deeply moved by reality in the light of faith. Other Lasallians can live this experience, based on their own beliefs, committed with us in building a world that is more human, with education as the starting point.

The 43<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter also set up some guidelines for us

to follow as regards continuing formation for Brothers and lay colleagues. In recommendation 4, for example, it was recommended that *the formation of Brothers and lay colleagues be a priority in the Institute for the next seven years*. The same General Chapter asked those in charge of plans of Lasallian formation in the Institute to assure that they *include a period of first-hand experience in the educational service of the poor, which is worthwhile, sufficiently long, and accompanied* (Proposition 11, Circular 447, page 17).

Formation for association should keep in mind anthropological roots since the human person is a being who is in relationship and open to communion; biblical roots that remind us that we are called to be the people of God, always on a journey; ecclesiological roots that will allow us to live our faith as a community adventure and to share the charisms received from the Spirit and to be open to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue; Lasallian roots that nourish our spirituality and our mission.

It is obvious that the future of the Lasallian mission will depend in large measure on the formation of those in whose hands it is today. One of the most important ministries of the Brother today is to be the memory of the charism for other members of the Lasallian Family. At the same time, humbly, we should be open to receive the richness that lay persons can contribute to us, as the document *Vita Consecrata* puts it: *The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the*

*apostolate (Vita Consecrata 55). Each of should feel rich in giving and poor in receiving.*

I think it is important to point out that the world that is created around the Lasallian educational program exists not only in function of the mission that it carries out but that it also encounters an ambit of personal, family, and community growth. This is because every Lasallian center should be a place of life that allows for meeting with different groups, exchanging ideas, renewing family life, participating in liturgy and sacraments, having interreligious dialogue, responding to existential concerns through a shared spirituality. All these elements need to be present in an integrated process of formation.

## **Conclusion**

*You carry out a work that requires you to touch hearts, but this you cannot do except by the Spirit of God. Pray to him to give you today the same grace he gave the holy apostles, and ask him that, after filling you with his Holy Spirit to sanctify yourselves, he also communicate himself to you in order to procure the salvation of others (Meditation 43.3).*

We cannot give what we do not have. This text from the Founder for the Feast of Pentecost is, it seems to me, one of the most beautiful to have come from his pen, and that is why I repeated it again. It is beautiful and it is profound. It is about our being filled with the Spirit in order to be able to pass it on later to our students, to persons to whom our ministry is directed or to the Brothers who walk with us. I

believe that this is the culmination of our formative life journey: to let the Spirit act in us and be our spiritual master. It is about, as the Rule tells us, being *faithful, above all, to Jesus Christ, to his gospel and to his Spirit* (Rule 142).

Our formative life journey invites us to keep on going, to always be open to change and to look toward the future. Our goal is eschatological. The Dominican, Felicísimo Martínez has highlighted three signs that may show that we are anchored to the past: the priority given to repairing buildings, the care of the archives, and the multiplication of programs and regulations. Today the call that the Church makes to us is very different. The Church invites us *to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of our founders... But it is also a call to pursue competence in personal work and to develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission, adapting forms, if need be, to new situations and different needs, in complete openness to God's inspiration and to the Church's discernment. But all must be fully convinced that the quest for ever greater conformity to the Lord is the guarantee of any renewal which seeks to remain faithful to an Institute's original inspiration* (Vita Consecrata 37).

Father Giacomo Bini, former Minister General of the Franciscans, expressed the same idea with these challenging words: *Ordinarily, an Institute dies historically when it only grabs hold of "archeological" stability, of forms, of letting the idea of conservation prevail in detriment to the idea of conversion. In this way, its history becomes a solemn apologia and a triumphal celebration of the past that must be told. All of this can be very satisfying but it can also make one very sleepy! In*

*fact, a “policy of conservatism,” that is locked up in historical motivation and views of a vague romantic flavor, is always destructive: it does not offer possibilities for generating new, vital projects, nor does it create energy or enthusiasm (Giacomo Bini, OFM).*

The same Father Bini, in his report to his General Chapter of 2003, proposed to the Franciscans a kind of moratorium in order to get back on track in today’s history and to better incarnate the original charism. His prophetic words were: *We cannot continue letting ourselves be led by the “survival syndrome” or by activism. We need to have the courage to impose a “moratorium,” individually or as a fraternity, of various durations, in order to re-orient our life, to “return to the Father” (Vida Religiosa, Madrid, volume 100, cuaderno 1, 2006).* Personally, I think that in our case that moratorium can very well be the extraordinary exercise of formation that we are being asked to consider on the Institute level, so that all of us reflect, with a view to the General Chapter, on BEING BROTHERS TODAY.

On one of the public buildings in San José, the capital of my country, the words of a national poet are inscribed and they express the idea that darkness is never stronger than just before daybreak. These words, perhaps, suggest what we ourselves have experienced on more than one occasion. The recent International Assembly on the Lasallian Educational Mission and Association and the upcoming 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter are, no doubt, lights that can illuminate this slow advancing dawn that we all desire, and our own formative life journey. I would, therefore, like to conclude

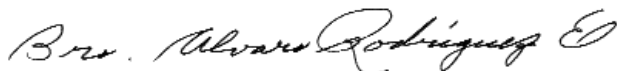


this letter with the words of another poet, and I invite you to make them your own.

*It is late,  
but it is our time.  
It is late,  
but it is all the time we have on hand  
to create our future.  
It is late,  
but we are at this late hour.  
It is late  
but the dawn will come if we urge it on.*

Monsignor Casaldáliga

Fraternally yours in De La Salle,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Bro. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría  
Superior General