

HOW LASALLIANS FORM THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE VIEW ASSOCIATION. ACCOUNTS BY BROTHERS AND SECULARS OF RELEM

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ABSTRACT

This article continues a series of reports drawn up from research on Identity and Association in all the Regions of the Institute. It is based on accounts from Brothers and Seculars in the Lasallian Region of Europe and the Mediterranean, and arranges the answers of those taking part in the investigation, as to how they understand Lasallian Association, what are their own convictions which maintain their commitment as Lasallians, and to what extent and in what relationships do those convictions help them in their own life project.

Key words: Association, convictions, processes, personal life project, itinerary.

Introduction

This is the continuation and the second section of a series of studies based on accounts from Brothers and Seculars from every part of the Institute. Those persons were invited to describe the view from their own experience of association in the De La Salle Brothers institute. What follows is based on accounts from RELEM, the Region of Europe and the Mediterranean.

It was decided that each District would be invited to select five Brothers and five Secular persons to answer a questionnaire of three questions connected with their own experience of Association, the convictions which support them in their Lasallian life, and the relationship between association and their personal life project. The persons selected would be from different age-groups and varied kinds of work in the Districts.

The questionnaire was sent to the Brothers Visitors in February 2010, and was to be returned by the 31 May, though some continued to arrive up to the 10 June of that year.

This report is based on the analysis of the contents of 39 questionnaires returned from RELEM: 17 Brothers (11 of middle age and 6 of retirement age) and 22 secular persons (7 women and 15 men) from the Districts and Sectors composing the Region, from Cataluña (13), Italy (9), Bilbao (5); Andalucía, Valladolid and Madrid (3); Valencia, South Belgium and the Near East (1).

This report results from qualitative research, based on a hermeneutic-symbolic paradigm. To do this, the answers to the questionnaire were analyzed by a method known as “proportional to the text”. This aims at identifying the key ideas (nuclear references) and the proposals which back them (propositions), in keeping with the method devised by Bardin (cf. 2009: 234). The analysis was made with the help of conceptual maps or diagrams for each type of answer. With the elements thus categorized, we proceeded to build a synthesis of each question asked, integrating the ideas of those answering the questionnaire.

The report has two sections as well as an Introduction:

- A synthesis of the answers of Brothers and Seculars already categorized as based on the nuclear-references and the proposals which follow from them.
- Identification of what can be inferred from the interpretation of the data received.

The result of our interpretation has reference value, that is one which invites those questioned to share their ideas through fraternal dialogue, taking a broad view of the situation and offering suggestions concerning common projects. In view of which, a second part of this report will consist in our requesting those who answered the questionnaire, to send in a feed-back on our interpretation of the results, in such a way that they can assess or discuss our proposed interpretation of their answers and become themselves, co-authors of the report.

What the Brothers think.

a. How do you understand Association?

Middle-aged brothers (35-65)

From their accounts we can identify four nuclear-references: the central role of association, the ability to change, the processes which are thus required and solidarity.

- The central role of Lasallian association: this is a pillar of our own vocation. “We are associated to share the mission”. By it the educational ministry is strengthened, because it gives witness of why we work, arm in arm, as brothers and seculars, each taking up our pedagogical responsibilities.

Association means revitalizing two forms of relationship: the first is that with the brothers, which implies sharing hopes, expectations, fears and difficulties; it is a radical change in the methods of communication within the framework of community experience. The second form is in regard to those with whom they share the mission; it is a help by which the Brothers value more strongly their religious life by re-discovering the spiritual, educational and formative commitment of their associates. Supported by the wonderful experiences of secular persons publicly committed as associates, the brothers feel ever more ready to have confidence in those with whom they share the mission. This experience “allows me to live my style of life with hope in the service of the God of love and in the persons with whom I live.

The Brothers express their conviction of the unique nature of the vow of association, in as much as it affords them a better understanding of the Rule, from a theological point of view, and of the ecclesiology of communion. By means of it, in a remarkable way, there exists a deep feeling that association leads brothers to a greater understanding of the other vows. It acts as an integrating element in the brothers’ life. “I keep on re-reading my religious life through the prism of association”. Those are the twin poles which give meaning to vowed commitment.

When reference is made to their formation as brothers, whilst some say that association was present as a theme of their studies, others affirm that they were not prepared for it, but that right now “the presence of secular persons has made us revise our way of acting and our relationship with them”.

- The dynamism of association develops the ability to change in the person of the brother, because it is a way of being; of living; nourishes the ability to face the challenge of change. Consequently, it is an “invitation to refound our life style as religious educators, by a living passionately for God and for humanity”, in fact to face with a new vision the God-ordained mysterious future, by learning to see oneself in the eyes of others, by seeking common growth in the light of Christ who calls us.

Lasallian association involves a promise to others and to God to be united in order to manifest the message of union. “I have given my word to being together and by association with my brothers”, to commit myself, no matter what difficulties may arise. I shall be encouraged in my journey with those who commit themselves with me, and they in turn will be similarly encouraged.

- Understanding that association has been a long process:

First of all considering the brothers as the first associates of the Lasallian Family “I share with them my life plan., “I feel united with them to serve, their company is my home, my family”!. “We are a community in communion and without this communion association does not exist.”

Nevertheless, today we are open to new ideas. “Formerly we understood that to the brothers belonged the role of leadership of other Lasallians”. “Today we realize that the lasallian vocation implies accompaniment and together discerning ways of being faithful to De La Salle. It is a reality which arises at an ecclesial and institutional time which is different, when the brothers feel, , followers and disciples of Jesus Christ, together with secular persons.

It is the time to re-enforce a second kind of association, which is a tremendous God-send, since it opens up possibilities to give fresh life to the mission and to enrich our relationship with other Lasallian vocations. At the same time it is a way of enriching the Church, by helping seculars in their vocation, since, because of it, their family life is empowered and renewed. We journey together, brothers and seculars, to revitalize our educational evangelizing mission, together we pray our spiritual life and our fraternity.

- Lasallian association gives growth to our solidarity with those who proclaim and those who receive the mission message. Solidarity with those who proclaim is derived from the vows made in 1694 and their decision to remain lay persons, and even before that from the time of the heroic vow of 1691. It makes us equally responsible for animation and management together with persons we have invited to join us in our adventure. Solidarity implies being convinced that “I am not going to fail you and I shall make every effort to be united with you”. “Existentially you can count on me” ; “I am ready to support the network of schools without enjoying any glory which might ensue”. Of course, solidarity is expressed towards the subjects of our mission, which implies risking oneself so that small benefits might ensue.

Brothers of retirement age (65+)

We can identify four nuclear-references among these brothers: the commitment it implies, the union of brothers and seculars, reconsideration of how our institute was founded, and the experience of vocation.

- Lasallian association is recognized by a commitment which used to belong only to brothers, but which now includes seculars in the institute's objectives and goals. It is centered on the mission which is shared by brothers and seculars.

Now, each brother, each community and district – the entire Institute are all invited to consider the vow of association as a consecration which is full of the sense of mission. Particularly, association is transformed into a kind of invitation so that the brothers understand their vows as another manifestation of a life which requires a style with more evangelization.

- Association is linked to the relationship which should exist between Brothers and Seculars. “The brothers should be generous and brave in accompanying this new flowering of Lasallian life. They should recognize that de La Salle is not the personal property just of the brothers. Those who took part in the enquiry want seculars to be adequately trained so that they can take part in the work with conviction”. “The presence of seculars is a sign of the Times”. De La Salle has reached beyond the community of the brothers and the Institute”; it is the expression of the vitality of our charism.
- Association is the result of a re-reading of the early foundations of the Institute. Based on reflections on the early days, they are assisted understanding the intuitions of De La Salle and which continue throughout the institute, becoming a reality today able to answer the needs of the mission. Association gives us a greater comprehension of what De La Salle's intentions were, when he founded the Institute and it encourages us to revitalize our vow of Association.
- It is a vocational experience. Brothers were not meant to live in some kind of enclosed garden”, nor “to live a Lordly kind of existence” By living the Lasallian spiritual life, associated with seculars, they renew their vocation: “I finally understand the very centre of my brotherhood”. “the call of God becomes something meaningful”, “I thank Him for allowing me to persevere up to now” and “I hope it will last forever”

b. What convictions allow you to live your De La Salle life?

Middle aged brothers (35-65)

Five nuclear-references: vocation, Jesus Christ, community, education and charism. Here follow the details:

- Association is based on the reality of the Call of God. This has certain requirements and needs specific convictions concerning the radical nature of our calling and the central nature of God in our life. “I am in the hands of God, because I know my unassisted limits”. I gain confidence from his presence, and I live my vocation recognizing that “God directs all things with wisdom and love”. “The vow of association is of the very essence to our vocation as brothers”.

The first conviction is of the call of God. “I am an instrument: “what does God expect of me?” I begin to realize my happiness and that I have purpose” “God wants me here, so I am available, though I have quite a few defects”. “It is great having the support of the brothers” and of course, “having God as my helper, God in whom my heart can rest”. We need to see each day that what we do is for Him and through his help. “You have called me and I have answered”

Being called brings with it a recognition, understanding and a special way of living each and every day. It is an explanation of shared Christianity, in community, which invites us to be instruments of God, so “that young people will see the same in themselves” and realize that God speaks within them.

- “Since for me, life is Christ”, I feel a call which I must answer”, sharing with the brothers and all those who adopt our mission and spirituality. “I want God to be the centre of my life” Jesus leads the brothers to make the Trinity central to their life; the brother is one who really experiences a “passion for God and Humanity”. Accepting the will of God is the very basis of his consecration.

Since the brother is celibate, just as Jesus was in his obedience and fellowship with the poor, he prepares himself to tell young people the Good News; he becomes another Christ wherever he is: he puts aside that avenging God and thinks only of the God of love and mercy.

- Association within the brothers community means a living fraternal charity. The brother’s identity means relationship by not exclusivity in living in a way that is taken up and integrated into his person and he lives it with other Lasallians. There are definite aspects in his life as a brother, but they are not different from the living as a Christian.

Outside his community, association allows the brother to hand on the Gospel values to young people, and thus he considers his vocation as an ecclesial ministry. He has a sense of Church, because of his baptism and being heir of the apostles. He has received an unmerited mission and is able to be integrated with others. He has a commitment to give personal witness within the community and in the world of education and culture; he has a feeling of promoting, from his experience, “a sign of community in the world of today” especially in Europe.

- Christian education from infancy right up to youth is a real and urgent need, which is the result of the same dynamism as association. “There are tremendous economic problems, as well as social and psychological ones in the first and third world”, which call for action, especially for the youngest students, and for young people who don’t know where to go in a climate of genuine educational emergency. “I want to give them my health and my concern”. It is the aesthetic value of the person, based on the passion for ‘God ad humanity. We know that Faith without works is valueless, and that human relationships are the best way that we have of accomplishing our mission.
- Finally, Charism is structured on three pillars: the spirit of Faith, zeal and our character as associates. It is not the property only of the brothers: Seculars take it on as a means of developing their own vocation. “With seculars we are all together, and are a guarantee, a heart and a reminder of our charism”.

Retired brothers (65+)

Here we find three nuclear-references: vocation, community and a refounding of the Institute

- Their deepest conviction is that of being called by God to be united with their brothers. “t is an unmerited Call”. “I always call on Him to make me faithful. They realize that the love of

God requires dialogue with their intelligence, and they thus discover life in the presence of God in the whole Cosmos, in history, in the Bible and in human psychology.

As brothers they see the need of dialogue with others; “it is a dialogue rooted in a culture, acquired thanks to frequent systematic study. Without this conviction, it is not possible to understand or live association.

“I am a brother of the Christian Schools”. My life plan is to live the Gospel in the Lasallian way. “I am a committed layman”; with my vows I become part of a definite kind of religious life”. Like the Founder, I have to act out my vocation, getting to know the needs of young people of each period. “I am ready freely and responsibly to undertake the mission of the Institute”. That is to announce the kingdom by Christian education, chiefly to the sons of artisans and the poor. Thus I build “communities of association, of brothers and seculars, for the needs of education.”

- Community is a source of grace helping me to live out my vocation, together with the Brothers and Lasallians. As brothers we “need to be more open”, which means that “no one can say he is too old” to collaborate in the accepting, the formation and the accompaniment of seculars. Communities “must be mirrors of care and attention, full of confidence, happy and full of hope.” for all who meet the brothers. We are invited to count more on what we do than what we say”
- Re-founding the Institute is a reality which we must gladly accept. We must pay no attention to pessimistic prognostications. “If we are faithful to the charism of de La Salle, the institute will be refounded if necessary”.

c. What is the relationship between Lasallian association and one’s personal life project as a brother.

Middle-aged brothers (35 - 65)

With these men there are four nuclear-references: need to give answers via association, witnessing communities, communion and solidarity.

- “Association is a wager on the future”: it needs to give reasonable answers, even radical ones, which does not mean the brothers are better than others: the need comes from their status as religious. “I need to fight our preconceptions”, there are brothers who refuse to look at statistics and see what the future will be like.

The brothers also feel the need to discover cultural and spiritual ways of understanding association. “It is practically the only way that our Institute can advance” Seculars are preparing themselves with patience and humility; “we must commit ourselves to their formation, sharing what we have and are.”

What can be the signs of vitality for a brother these days? “prayer, formation, living together, interpersonal relationships, the educational-evangelizing project and a clear district plan.”

- In the life plan of the brothers it is important to live in community giving witness to association. “I believe in the prophetic value of consecrated life” If only we could have a community of brothers in every establishment”. I find it hard to believe that there are no

young people with a vision of a life project which has sustained me” and makes sense of my life.

Dialogue, Faith and friendly meetings should take place with other associates, so that the various roles of each is made clear in our efforts at transforming society. Prayer is paramount to help us to be and appear “witnesses of the strength of God” before our students and collaborators.

The brothers themselves are called to spread and accompany this style of the life of Faith and commitment before our associates, as an example that others can also follow suit in their own life.

- The brothers emphasize the value of communion among the different vocations connected by the same mission. Lasallianism has varied forms, and “all forms should be accepted and loved and respected”. Married associates can live their mission with passion and the brothers are enriched by their example. The secular vision and religious consecration enrich one another, thus showing that the Spirit enriches the church continually. Association then is a new strength which assists us all to unite in the education of the needy.

Seeking unity is the distinctive note of all those keen on association. Christ is present in this human association. It is hoped that “the school will have eyes and ears” to attend to our neighbors, to bring the young to Christ.

- Solidarity is another aspect resulting from Association.

It is shown by basic human attitudes: The brothers stop thinking they are the Lords of the school and owners of the mission” and begin to “realize that others have good ideas too and important ones.” “Things can be done differently”. Solidarity also allows us to be modest in our community homes, which the brothers can make a welcoming place with a prayerful atmosphere which helps one to listen to the Spirit.

Seculars are led to have confidence in their colleagues with whom they forge friendships, giving themselves to others as much as possible and in their midst showing humility yet manifesting an ability to face life’s challenges with serenity, including old age.

In the mission, solidarity helps me to benefit of the needy”. Present day events “lead me to arrange my day to suit recent changes”. “We realize that we are members of an institute which is holy but mediocre”, and that I am part of a Church “which is weak and disorientated” but both “instruments of salvation”.

Retired brothers (65+)

Three nuclear-references: Personal conviction of the vitality of the Lasallian charism, sharing in the building of the Lasallian Family and formation as a need to ensure fidelity.

- That “Lasallian charism is alive” is seen in all the questionnaire answers. “I believe in the vitality of the brothers and also in the strength and creativity of associates”. “I believe in the future of our society”. We are proud that seculars are sharing our charism “Let the little children come to Me”

- The life plans of the elderly show enthusiasm for the Lasallian Family, it is attractive and is a different ways of belonging to the Institute. “It is time for the Institute to define what the Family stands for, avoiding confusion between brothers and secular members; Criteria should be drawn up for defining the commitment of associates.”
- Association requires Lasallian formation with the following objectives: Christian vocation in the ministry of education, making clear the unique nature of “the Lasallian School, open to all”. It is an invitation to “every community to construct a Christian family, inspired by the Spirit.

“My personal project and Lasallian Association coincide exactly”. We are committed to the formation of seculars, in their fidelity to God who has set them on their way. “I hope for successors who will whole-heartedly take on the Lasallian ideals which have inspired me so far”. “I want to work at this as much as I can.”

Seculars’ reporting on their experiences

a. How they understand Lasallian Association.

Female Lasallians.

With these we find three nuclear-references: Association as a commitment, importance of the Family, and the personal itinerary.

- They first consider association as a commitment arising from a call. “I am called and I must answer the call”. “The brothers have placed their confidence in me”. “I feel the hand of God which leads me to be committed” So “I feel responsible for the salvation of the children.”

Relationship with the brothers has been vital in this experience. “a brother called me *dear brother*). They have “enabled me to realize that I had to associate myself with the community”. This invitation opened their heart to being able to take the road which led to their identity as Lasallians.

“I want to build the kingdom of God with them”. I, a lay woman, heard the call and I answered. From then on, I have gradually walked in company with the Institute, “which aims at the salvation of the poor through education”. Association therefore becomes a link of faith based on confidence in Jesus. “It is a call to live my Christianity with an experience, which has bettered my interior life and my profession, I see sense in what we are doing and how we do it. “What counts is the conviction of what you do, really counts”.

- These lady Lasallians feel that association is lived in conjunction with their family. “My husband and children always stress that I must never fail to be the centre, with my husband, of the Family. Home for them is paramount, so times are allotted to the mission which do not hinder family commitment.
- The personal itinerary involves association as one element in daily life, springing from the school and its work of which I am one part. This has led me to a gradual commitment “to the work, just as I have frequently heard was the case with the Founder.

Association consists in living the project of the educational mission, “sharing with persons who have the same ideas as I”, a gradual process.

Male lasallian educators

Four nuclear-references: process towards commitment; value of the family; association being the life and soul of Lasallian identity.

- Association is a dynamic process and a personal one, “because I am sure that La Salle is a work of God” for it leads to evangelization, especially of the most needy” To share in it, “it is not necessary to hold a post of responsibility, but to be a teacher and a Christian educator.”

This leads to community. “it is a community reality where I can really live the mission”. It results from deep personal relationships which have intensified my feeling of belonging; “it forms strong links of inter-relationships. It allows us to share our faith, life and leisure. It ensures Lasallian identity in the school.

For some “it has not made much [deep] difference; I continue my daily work”. However for others it is difficult to take on, when there are no brothers in the school, for as is known: vocations are few and far between. This is even worse when brothers don’t get on with one another and seculars notice tensions in a district.

The answers show that by association seculars feel committed to consider the Lasallian mission as theirs. “I feel responsible for transmitting human and Christian values, sharing with my colleagues the idea that there exists another way of educating. It is vital to keep in contact with the families of the students.

A special case. “I feel I am a member of the Lasallian Family, but I don’t feel called to be an associate” My feelings will be just the same as a cooperator. I intend to continue in the work of de La Salle, my relationships with the brothers and other Lasallians will not change. I think that when someone is a member of the lasallian family he is already an associate”

- “Association is complementary to family life, to my being a husband and father”. “I have thought of my wife and she is involved and realizes that association is something more than a mere contract”. It touches every aspect of life, “my personal life is linked to my lasallian life: they are united”. But “my marriage is more important than my association”.
- Association is the vocational axis of life. “It didn’t come first from me, I felt the initiative came from the Spirit who showed me the way and how to follow it, I walked with the Spirit”. My being an educator, a Christian, and having my community and my family are the bases which sustain it. “My commitment and attitudes are seen through the prism of association which is the centre of my reflections and actions.”

“In La Salle I feel my vocation as educator and by it I have learned to work with seculars and brothers: it is of living the Christian life. I am pleased with what I do, though it requires effort.. But via La Salle I am growing in spirituality, reflection and discernment.

- Association results in lasallian identity by which I become identified with the person of de La Salle, as model educator. This is shown in many ways: by affection and support, by friendship and availability and commitment to serve others especially those in difficulty. It

is also shown by the way I run my house, by sharing ideas with others, by being a layman in the Church and society, by being a Christian via lasallian charism.

b. What convictions support you in your life?

Lasallian female educators.

Four nuclear-references for these ladies: importance of family; community; education-evangelization and itinerary or life project.

- “In my family and the education of my family are the roots of my being.” Without them I could not be integrated into association.” It was my parents who early instilled in me a religious attitude and a sense of values.” “It is the same for all women who have a family as well as being a teacher.” “I could not understand Lasallian experience without involving my husband and family.” “The fact that my husband has also lasallian experience is a great help to me”
- “In La Salle we work as a community” My life would be different if I lived alone”. Each one learns from the experience of others, “without emblazoning personal creativities or initiatives. “We work with others not on the margins of others”.

We are glad to talk familiarly with one another and with the brothers, I appreciate the wisdom of the older brothers. This relationship is indispensable if we want to share and celebrate together: it nourishes our mission. In fact “its creative fidelity helps me to grow” We share successes and failures” and “the way of judging events” and moments of prayer and reflection.

The best preparation has been sharing life with the brothers: Their availability and generosity is a tremendous help and it allows each person to bring their own habits and answers to vocation. The brothers of my college are fantastic at this. I am the fruit expecting attention from the one who showed me and who believed in me.

Some criticisms are noted which emphasize the importance of Brothers being with and accompanying associates in their growth towards association with the Institute. We need “help from the centre of the District”, “we are too dispersed” “some are disillusioned because not everyone feels appreciated by the community”

- Association means education and evangelization above all other considerations. Young people need an open door to hope. “The method of education favored by de La Salle is one of the keys to my option for and the strength of our projects”. We evangelize via education, and we feel we are Lasallians for the poor. Seculars, when they join this evangelization must share what they feel in order to respond to the call that they have received.
- Association is a kind of itinerary, a life project. “My route is special since it is my own and has been influenced by significant events”. My life has a deep meaning, I feel genuinely identified with de La Salle.

“The more I go on the more I need a sense of community of faith and prayer”. Day to day life leads me concentrate on what counts in order to avoid mere routine. “The fact of my public commitment forces me to accept fully the task I have been assigned.” “The Lasallian project is the project of everyone, and of course of myself: all of us are educators. I am

impressed by Lasallian interior riches. In them I place my confidence and love". "Towards my colleagues in this I have fraternal love, based on Jesus' love".

Association is an open dynamism which is forever practical: "What does God want of me just now?" "Jesus calls me to build his kingdom" What does God want of you today? God calls us with wisdom just as St. De La Salle does "We are living in a historic period for Lasallianism and we must face the consequences and follow this new model": A new future lies ahead for Lasallians..

Lasallian male educators

Five nuclear-references: the novelty presented; the important fact of education; community as reference centre; interior processes engendered; Identity with La Salle. Let us elucidate:

- Association invites us "to grasp these innovations as a marvelous period which is opening up. "The Spirit invites us to be rid of our old routines" "This new methodology is from God: it is like a new birth" in the life of everyone, recalling what Nicodemus said (John 3). It is a period of change "We are used to the old conformities, but now we require fresh answers.

Association "invites us to challenge the way we have lived" , "My own experience sustains my lasallian philosophy" because it affords the possibility of meeting God who calls me "Open your heart, widen your fraternity" find "new ways of acting". It implies "a permanent effort to assimilate, learn, deepen the theme of the charismatic family of La Salle. .

- Association is related directly with education and evangelization of the young. "I live education, first as a vocation, in order to continue finding a ministry in it". Christian education is a personal itinerary which "gives a desire to assume the charism in the Church" As a secular "it helps me to find the ministerial aspect of my work.

"I love being with youngsters to direct them, educate them, teach them" We deal with human attitudes in persons who are growing up" they are actors in their own life, assessing it, calmly and joyfully, based on the Gospel: "One brings out the best in youngsters to increase their self-esteem and "and we concentrate most on the weakest". Especially do I like "to show my presence to those who are having difficulties" "I have always had someone at my side who has supported me".

This way of educating tries "to show how the Gospel is Good News". That conviction is sustained by Christian education and by the strength of having an educator close by as witness and for catechesis.

- To make association effective it is important to have a small community of brothers and seculars close by, which supports, animates and keeps the flame of shared mission alight. "Together and by Association" becomes more and more a reality. We are called to be "visible signs of community" "witnesses of an education given together. Together "we can lighten the burden of teaching" to "confront what education means nowadays"
- It is a call to feed the interior life. Faith is a basic pillar; "Daily I cultivate my faith in God and in the Lasallian project with the help of the community. We have to be believers whilst with the family and school. Promoting interior life to the world disarrayed by mere material

things and which has abandoned things spiritual; call attention “to the heart” recognizing “the great things the Almighty has helped us to do.”

When an educator realizes the gap between the complications of the mission and his own limitations, he realizes he needs a formation to renew and extend his lasallian experience, especially to strengthen those promises that he made and continues to use with the help of those persons who have so far accompanied him.

- One identifies oneself with La Salle. In this way the educator can discover God in those who he has contact with. “We struggle to build the Kingdom of God by living the Gospel, committing ourselves to the least favored of society.

“The Founder is present to me in my own life and work” “His educational and pedagogical intuitions” continue in their relevance today. “We have a charismatic identity of pertinence which enriches us and gives life to our differences”. This does not imply uniformity, on the contrary, “Differences are beneficial to the mission”

“The Institute and its charism are key factors in my life”; there are different ways, by mine is Lasallian.”

c. **Relate Lasallian Association with your life project.**

Lasallian female educators

Three nuclear-references: Lasallian identity, family, vocation.

- It’s one more step to exemplify “what already existed”. It is an identity which has matured.”I continue being the same believer who has been enthralled by the charism and feel compelled to live it and pass it on to others.

It is an acquired identity.”I have changed nothing in my life since I became an associate”. “I don’t aim to do more but to do things better” Association is my very own, so it is worth working for” La Salle makes me a better person.

“My life project is connected with Lasallian charism and spirituality”. “I am lasallian throughout my whole day”. “Nothing can separate me from this enthralling fundamental fact”. “I am a kind of Lasallian sister”. All this helps me to seek God in prayer, and gives meaning to my life and what I accomplish in education.”

- My life and family are part of the project of Lasallian association” When we decided to become associates I never doubted, because this family charism was already part of my life.” Association is a link with a community that is growing in the light of the Gospel: therefore La Salle is a pillar of my family”

Association has become part of my life as it has for all who have shared in its study. “My husband and children, all recognized from the beginning that school is where I am happy”. “That my husband has shared this project has helped us to understand our relationships as a couple”. The brothers “counsel you but always leave you your wings”

- Association involves the development of a route to vocational reflection and search. It is a commitment to help, sustain, and educate, which is human and Christian and is directed to

young people on the basis of Faith. “My dream became a reality; my profession has become a vocation, and I love it”. “I am thrilled at being able to teach, and at the same time learn something new” In this way I am becoming a positive factor in the building of the kingdom”

Committed association has consequences on one’s whole life: “I am just one more, but am of importance and I look on things differently”. “My colleagues respect my decision to be lasallian by association”

Lasallian male educators

Three nuclear-references: community in accompaniment, the need for formation, and the vocational aspect of association.

- Association affords links of union between persons; it becomes a form of life, with “wealth for oneself and benefit to the lasallian heritage”. It is an invitation to give “time, ideas, feelings and points of view to the Institute” and to all who benefit from its educational mission

This union is the result of accompaniment within a school, where the community assures the human and Christian education of the students. One contributor emphasized “the importance of the director, to establish his own project and that of Lasallian association”. He has “a genuine road of faith, intelligence in uniting various charisms, energy in activating the lasallian charism and ability to convert power into service” which have been paramount in helping the writer on the associative road.

“Association with others is to recognize their value, taking them as they are, living with them to encourage dialogue and listening”. Ideal fraternity should exist in a family, with spouse, companions, in the street and the city and the school, all being equal.”

- Formation should encourage growth, development of the heart, the memory and Lasallian charism. “It goes beyond a feeling of independence and belonging” It implies the need to share the brothers’ mission, not just as supernumeraries”. Without this secular involvement in the lasallian charism, it has little future” However one must take into account that this involvement “does not mean that the seculars of tomorrow will be the brothers of today”

Effective formation will without doubt “adapt the message of the founder to the new situation, with its innovations, creations, technologies, so it will be necessary to encourage growth within the context of actual society situations.

- Association is seen as a vocational process or road and requires from the one who lives it, a sense of gratitude, that is expecting nothing in return, because confidence in God’s presence is a great benefit, as is “believing in the God of Jesus Christ and feeling his love, therefore throughout my life I try to show respect and gratitude for all I have received”.

“Around association I have built my life project” “which is a concrete demonstration of my life and my experience of faith with my family.”I really believe that I am an associate, and swearing it publicly gives me further assurance” My life is immersed in: La Salle, so that it revolves round my status as associate. It is my style of life”. The two aspects are not mutually exclusive” “My project is marked by both association and mission”

Association leads me to cultivate the interior life: “because it is an experience of call and answer”. It requires from each person daily effort to make personal meditation, to attend Mass, to spend periods of prayer together and to share witness”. In other words “ to mature one’s decision into something permanent”

How can a personal vocation of associate be revitalized? Taking into consideration the decisions of the 43rd General Chapter, we can say: by living in accordance with the charism of La Salle, by cultivating the life of Faith, by living a community life, by ensuring the service of the poor and by being open to every circumstance.

What can be inferred from the above:

a. Concerning the concept of Association.

a.1 What are the common elements in the accounts above by brothers and secular persons?

- Lasallian association is **based on a journey of discovery which implies meetings**, and results from Faith within a community sharing the project of human and Christian education of children and young people, preferably of the poor or disadvantaged in society.
- When Brothers and seculars take up Lasallian association with its full vigor they develop personally and in community a **commitment in favour of the Institute of the Brothers educational mission**. This commitment consequent on a call from God, invites them to become one with the mission, each one according to a special vocation.
- Evidently the **dual community-mission** aspect is essential to understand what association involves. The one who feels invited by vocation feels so because of his experience of the community he has contact with, whether it is secular or of the Brothers; That community is there for a specific mission with selected personnel.
- Experience **of how the Institute was founded** is necessary to assess the value of association for brothers and seculars alike. Using the methods of the lasallian tradition involves a familiarity with the common Lasallian vocabulary, which comes from formation with others in community and prayers and discussions with one another. There is a **common identity** among the brothers who already have experienced this togetherness. So solidarity among the groups will be seen when difficulties have to be tackled.

a.2 What new elements appear in the concept of association?

- Brothers who took part in this enquiry have stated that the centrality of association requires consideration of the **vow of association** (for the educational service of the poor) as an integrating factor in the consecration of the brothers: it is a fundamental vow needed to understand all the other vows.
- There is a **before and an after** for the brothers in the Institute’s expression of the vow of association. The original vow, that of brothers only, continues to be basic and remains the seed of processes leading to the fact that association is not just for the brothers. Therefore the second association, this time in the presence of other Lasallian associates, makes brothers and seculars into memorials and guarantees of Lasallian charism, and today this is vital. The brothers progress with the new associates and with them express their hope in the future of the Institute.

- Seculars acknowledge that the **family is the fundamental axis of their experience**. However, lasallian association brings them something more, which alters somewhat their being as parents and spouses and professionals; it provides them with a view which helps them to make a new synthesis of their ordinary life plan: being secular Christians, married, and able to live their educational mission in a Lasallian manner. In order to be faithful to their associative commitment they have to think of their families of course, and negotiate with them times and places for their work, thus assuring their fidelity to their specific vocation.

b. Concerning the convictions which support your experience of association.

b.1 What are the elements common to what the brothers and seculars have written?

- Brothers and seculars are **convinced that they have been called**, and that this call has resulted in a new searching for the meaning of their everyday activities. It has been a gratuitous experience which has also allowed them to be generous and integrated in their school duties.
- The **community of reference** has been very important during one's journey; for the brothers, their own religious community; for the seculars, the community of brothers and seculars in the place where they work.
- **Association is not for oneself but for the mission**, which is of course the Christian education of children and young people, especially the poor and underprivileged. That is the mission of the Institute.

b.2 What are the new elements which appear in the concept of association?

- The brothers point out especially the **centrality of Jesus Christ** giving vocational energy to association. God is the very corner stone of a life based on the Gospel, especially in a community which should be a place of fraternal charity and of a mission undertaken gratuitously.
- **Concern about the future of the Institute is evident. Re-foundation** is mentioned by the retired brothers as an off-shoot of Lasallian association of brothers and seculars. Both are ready to thank God for his salvation plan. On this same theme, though not mentioned specifically, middle-aged brothers also show their hope in the lasallian charism as a shared experience taken up by seculars, with whom it is possible to be the heart and soul, the reminder and guarantee for the future.
- Interesting it is to note that when seculars talk of the vocation of association, they say their call was occasioned by **the presence and accompaniment of the brothers**, they have worked with and who have given them good example, accompaniment and formation.
- Discovery by seculars in general has been a **personal experience**, strengthened in them by a feeling of identity and belonging to a common project. It has resulted in each one questioning himself personally first, then in the company of a community, as to the meaning of their profession, and resulting finally in a process of discovering a vocation and a renewal of their experiences of family life.

c. Concerning the integration of association and one's life project.

c.1 What common elements are seen in the answers of secular Lasallians and brothers?

- In their answers there is **unity and coherence** in the above. This can be considered a wager on the future; based on it, hope is nourished as to the continuation and rebuilding of Lasallian charism; without association, there seems no future possible.
- Life is understood as a **vocational itinerary**, of careful each within a community which assures the formation and accompaniment based on the charism.
- One must promote **vocational complementarity** in those called to live by lasallian association. Solidarity between brothers and seculars does not mean uniformity, but respect for the itinerary of each one, a respect of the authentic vocation received by each. Confusing the two experiences, secular vision and commitment to the consecrated life, will prevent our seeing what is original in each one and which can ensure the benefit of the common objective of Christian Education.

c.2 What are the new elements which appear in the concept of association?

- Being an associate means, for brothers, a wager on **the competence of seculars**; consequently promoting the prophetic value of consecrated life and collaborating with and accompanying seculars in their lasallian formation and opening new avenues to solidarity in the task of their daily work, is vital for brothers, as well as revising the criteria of their own brotherly presence as the first in responsibility for the charism is the important task of the brothers.
- Association itself demands a major change of **definition and clarification of the Seculars' role**, based on their own experiences, in order to arrive at a new synthesis between their personal-family life and their ministerial commitment. This commitment to association has consequences for daily life of educators, who are expected to improve their interior life, as well as that of their vocation and renewed ministry.

Conclusion

As we found out in a similar study of RELAL, the effort to see and interpret those presentations is not an aseptic task, free from subjectivity. The outlining of what can be inferred continues to be a manner of interpretation and an understanding of a human spiritual experience which is personal and communitarian and involves the God of Jesus Christ within the setting of a lasallian Christian school.

The only purpose possible **for this text is for it to be read as an invitation to discussion with an open mind**. Which are the convictions which keep being repeated, and especially, what can be "read between the lines"? It is not meant as a complete treatise but as the **product of opinions of persons who have halted in their journey to share their major concerns**

It is evident that the **brothers of RELEM are an ageing community**, and this is coupled with an ever greater secularization of society. Multiculturalism and immigration are causing new challenges, easily seen in the schools which care for families of modest means. Vocations to the consecrated life are very few, as well as are Christians who face a life in keeping with their faith.

That is **why lasallian association offers a ray of sunshine** by its new approach to the model of Church-communion, as advocated by the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

We hope that this first draft will be read, reflected on and discussed by brothers and seculars who presented their contributions to the debate. We hope to gather your reflections and to re-write the document. Those who presented their ideas for consideration in the first instance can feel that their own voice is heard again. **As adult Christians, they will be committed to the development of a project, which by means of association, they will develop fresh vision. Thus they will be reminders and guarantors of the lasallian charism.**