

WHO IS JOAN CARLES VASQUEZ?

An Interview with the Regional Co-ordinator for Europe.

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Joan Carles, who do you say you are?

I am a Lasallian educator who is both disturbed and happy to be experiencing at first hand the profound changes of our time. It is a time when we have to adapt to new circumstances and also construct a new set of values as well. We need to give a new foundational impetus to our efforts in the work of education so as to find the right structures for the world of the 21st century. And just now I am also a Lasallian educator who is a bit overwhelmed by the new responsibility that has been given to him.

How do you react to the changes in this foundational epoch full of challenges and hopes?

Firstly with confidence. Although we have had our phases of paralysis, of defensive reactions and even of flight, I can see signs that the driving force is still there, ready to manifest itself. The light still beckons us forward and shows us the way. Secondly with hope. The road forward offers us an interesting challenge, and I am excited by the new goals that we can now aim at. Thirdly with impatience. Those needs that we are all pledged to respond to are more numerous and more urgent than ever.

What is happening in the Institute? Are there words to describe it?

This is a complex question and there is no easy answer. What is happening in the Institute cannot be separated from what is happening in the Church and in the world. No doubt words can be found to describe these developments, but I would prefer to leave that to the sociologists. Our mission is governed by words that are perennial rather than “old fashioned” or “new”. The word “evangelise” has the fundamental validity of something that always was and always will be. It does not mean indoctrinating people or converting them or “saving” them (in the way we used to understand that word). It means bringing the “good news” to people in dire need, bringing it to individuals and to whole groups, especially to young people through the work of education seen as a ministry.

What will Lasallian communities of the future look like?

I have no idea what the future will actually bring for Lasallian communities or for anything else. But I can tell you how I would like things to look like in the future. Lasallian communities of the future will be open communities, inclusive of all those who share in the same mission and seek the same goals. They will be places of dialogue and sharing by individuals from different backgrounds who feel the same compassion and are ready to come together to work for others. They will be dynamic communities not paralysed by rigid structures that define locations, functions and lines of command. They will be “incarnational” communities, based on a shared identity rather than just a physical sharing of the same place. There will be no room in them for anything that smacks of colonialism, paternalism, philanthropy or any other superior attitudes. They will be communities committed to the mission, totally absorbed in it and consecrated to it, not necessarily by vows but certainly by their faith and their understanding of Church.

And the new Lasallian Region of Europe? What does it mean? Why is it important?

Some problems are individual and personal; others concern whole groups in specific, concrete situations. The responses to problems should be direct and immediate, but experience tells us that the specific problems of concrete situations are in fact bound up with all kinds of structural problems. Often the same problems are being tackled by people in a number of different places, all reacting to their own local situation and using whatever means they have available to resolve the problem. Structural problems, however, need structural solutions and this can only come from joint action. Co-ordinated action is needed, if we are to tackle structural questions through shared analysis and reflection and by joint decision-making regarding policies, resources and similar matters. And it is not just a matter of globalisation bringing us closer together. The fact is that certain established paradigms have become obso-



lete. Here I am talking about territorial boundaries, national states and frontiers. These things have a restricting effect, making us too small to deal effectively with the structural problems that concern us all.

What is the brief of the Regional Co-ordinator of the REL?

We must take as our reference point what the Rule says about the role and functions of a Regional. It says that the Regional fulfils a co-ordinating role in those areas determined by the Conference of Visitors, in this case the European Visitors. He is President of the Conference of Visitors and ensures that its policies are put into effect. One specific area under his control is the Regional Novitiate.

When will you appoint the Animators of the four Regional Services? (*Life of the Brothers, Educational Mission, Pastoral, Finance*)

We are still going through the necessary stages of reflection and consultation. It is my intention to assemble a team that is representative of the full range of interests and local variations in Lasallian Europe. Getting the Region of Europe started is a big challenge. Besides considering the qualities needed in the members of the animating team, we have to take into account people's availability. My target date for everything is May 2007, when the European Visitors will hold a special meeting during the time of the General Chapter.

Will the Region of Europe have a special place in the Institute as a whole among the five other major Regions?

The Europe of the 17th Century was the cradle of the Institute. From there it later spread to

other parts of the world. From the beginning, a European outlook dominated the views and aims of the central administration. It was the Europe of colonialism, which spread its values around the world in many different ways and tried to duplicate its image of itself. But that Europe no longer exists. The Europe of today no longer sees itself reflected in those old parameters. It is a continent "under construction", trying to establish a cohesive identity for itself, to understand itself and to look into its future. And in order to face that future it must allow itself to be enriched by influences from all over the world. Europe is now a pluralist place, and it has to come to terms with its new diversity and rebuild itself on a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural foundation. It is also a more secularized place, but one in which there is, paradoxically, a wider range of religious options.

What are the urgent priorities for Lasallian Europe?

I would like to differentiate between what is "urgent", what is "important" and what is a "priority". These three terms are not synonymous. Urgent things are those that cannot wait. They are the least easy to predict. Priorities are things we cannot avoid doing first. The importance of a thing, on the other hand, depends on the choices we make about what can and should be programmed into our action plans and pursued with greater or less energy. For Lasallian Europe, I would pick out the question of identity as something that is important. By "identity", I mean the sense of belonging, the cohesion of Lasallian communities around an educational mission. Lasallian centres of education must define themselves as, and show themselves to be, places where the gospel message is a present reality.