

Partnership and Mission: The Assembly of the Four Councils

Kintbury, October 2008

Notes by [Terry Collins](#)

On October 25th, the four Councils of the District came together for the first time with the aim of formulating a common vision of Lasallian education in Britain and an understanding of the way in which each of the four Councils can contribute to that common mission. The meeting was really a follow-up to the District Chapter of last May, and it clearly marked a new phase in the evolution of Lasallian Association in Great Britain.

In all, twelve members of the four Councils were able to attend the meeting, and after welcoming them and leading them in a prayer, Brother Aidan spent some time outlining his articulation of the Lasallian vision of education. (See below.) People then divided into three groups, one for the Economic Council, one for the Formation Council and one for the LEM Council (with members of the District Council evenly distributed among these three groups). In their groups each Council was asked to specify how it saw its role in contributing to the common vision. This was related to the task already given to each Council to formulate its terms of reference, in other words to specify the areas of the District's educational mission that it was ready to 'own' and to commit itself to taking responsibility for.

The groups then came back together to share their responses, and this generated a rich and interesting discussion at the end of which people were asked to move towards more concrete answers to specific questions facing the District. The specific areas selected were placed firmly in the context of the propositions of the District Chapter and the action plan for the District Council that was generated by those propositions. People were also asked to keep in mind two communications from the Superior General and his Council: a) the letter of approval of the District Chapter Report and b) the letter concerning Lasallian Assemblies (reprinted in *Lasallians* vol. 5 no. 8).

In his opening words, Aidan said that the purpose of the day was to reflect on and explore our Lasallian vision for the next four years, to explore ways in which we can more effectively promote the Lasallian educational mission in the District and to brainstorm on strategies for implementing our vision in the light of our available resources. As a way of initiating the discussion, Aidan offered the following ideas.

The District vision is not going to be something new. It is based on fidelity to our original inspiration: "The purpose of the Institute is to provide a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it" (R.3). It is based on our Faith in the presence of God, our Concern for social justice, the respect we have for all (shown in quality relationships), the quality of our educational provision and the inclusiveness of our community in association. The question each of the Councils had to ask itself was: how it can best work towards implementing this vision and making it chime with our Lasallian reality.

The key elements in this vision are: active support of Lasallian educational centres, support for Heads/Governors, the support of the De La Salle Trustees in negotiations etc., the appointment of suitable Governors, appropriate financial support from the Trust, formation in the Lasallian charism for staff, students and governors, the promotion of local and international networking through sharing good practice and reciprocal visits, the development of appropriate structures for partnership/association.

Aidan reminded people of the journey we have travelled to bring us where we are, beginning with the inspiration offered by the International Assembly on Lasallian Education in 2006 and the 44th General Chapter in 2007. He also reminded us that what we are undertaking is part of an Institute-wide search, and he pointed to the Australia Districts magazine *Touching Hearts* (Spring 2008) which referred to the need for "*The provision of the means by which all parties engaged in the conduct of the Lasallian mission have guaranteed access to deliberative participation in final decisions made in respect of the mission in the District.*" And he cited Brother Nicolas Capelle's Letter to the Brothers of France (September 2008), which states that "*This restructuring, adapted to local realities, will have to be undertaken with attention to prayer, community sharing, and the educational service of the poor.*"

Aidan commented on the obligation for the District to exercise a responsible stewardship of its assets in the interests of the mission. This must include: the transparent management of financial assets, the adoption of ethical investments, the appropriate protection of property through insur-

ance, equitable rents and a care to maximize returns on sales etc. All this requires the use of appropriate legal and financial advice and involves us in using just and legal employment practices regarding pay, health and safety, safeguarding, etc.

All of our Communities need to be committed to this responsible stewardship. In line with the documents on "Being Brother To-day", our vision must include an active support of the Brothers, based on a recognition of the profile of the Brothers in the District today and in response to the prescription in the Rule that "the first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life." (R.24) The support of communities includes helping them to face the challenge of the 44th General Chapter calling us all to "interior life" and "community life". Our vision will include a commitment to promoting the Brother's vocation (though not exclusively) and a commitment to the care of our elderly and infirm Brothers.

We must also make a commitment to Lasallian formation including formation for Lasallian Heads, Lasallian In-service in Schools, workshops for Governors on the Lasallian message, the support of chaplaincy work in Lasallian Schools (e.g. through the LAMB and Kintbury programmes). We are already committed to the Australian programme for Lasallian leaders. Other programmes need to be considered, for example in our structures for Lasallian Youth

In the afternoon, people divided into just two groups and were asked to focus on the following areas as requiring urgent decision:

- our commitment to a Resource Centre in practical terms,
- Local Lasallian Assemblies linked to the Advent/Lent Lasallian Days,
- the Lasallian Assembly to precede our next District Chapter in 2012.
- the District's Lasallian magazine,
- our support for the Lasallian Youth / Young Lasallians.

In the final session of the day, the two groups reported back on their discussions on these five questions. The main points made were as follows.

Resource Centre

It would be important to decide whether it is to be a real centre or just an office. The job specification of the person in charge must be made clear. It could be a Brother or a lay person. It would be preferable to have a team associated with the centre/office, rather than just one person. The person in charge should be both a co-ordinator and communicator, and should be able to deliver programmes as well

as store material. There is a real lack of a central location where information can be obtained on request. At the same time the office/centre must be more than just an archive. Resources are to be seen in terms of formation, and we need to start with an audit to identify and locate existing materials and competent persons. Financial considerations are important, and an office could ensure savings by being operated electronically. We live in a digital age. The central office could also be linked with the resources used to produce the District magazine. An office as such could easily be accommodated in the existing space in 140 Banbury Road. It might be possible eventually to renovate "the hut" and make it into a conference centre. It was pointed out that the District Chapter had mandated the Brother Visitor to act on this matter. *Proposition 11: That the Chapter authorise the Visitor and his Team to establish a District Resource Centre with a brief to include communications.*

Lasallian Days

It was agreed that these should be opened to a wider clientele than just the Brothers. It was felt that the focus for such Lasallian Days should be on Association for the Mission. We could use the MEL booklets as a source for the topics. Reference was made to the minutes of the Formation Council meeting where this question had been discussed. The Formation Council has said that it is ready to take responsibility for the Lasallian Days in Lent 2009, but not those in Advent of this year. It was suggested that we might encourage more local meetings in addition to the Regional meetings. Lamb does in fact meet on a more frequent basis.

Magazine

The report from the Working Group appointed by the District Council to consider this question is not yet available. There was a general consensus that there should be a down-sized version of the old newsletter for communities, which could be sent out electronically. In addition there would be a District Magazine, produced once a term or twice a year, which would aim at a wider audience. It should not be over-ambitious and we must stick to what is sustainable. It would be important to identify local correspondents. No names were suggested for the post of editor in chief.

Young Lasallians

No progress was made in the discussion of this question due to lack of time.

Finally, it was agreed that we should confirm the booking of St Cassian's Centre for an Assembly next Palm Sunday weekend, 3-5 April 2009.