

# NEWS FROM RELEM

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## News from the General Council

The General Council met in September for its "autumn session". The agenda was heavy and the time passed very quickly. The Council met all the heads of the secretariats and of the Generalate departments who were now in place, to assess the current situation and plan future action. Also a number of dossiers were examined, including the following :

- approval of the conclusions of the MEL assemblies. You have received a note in this connection.
- the accounts and budgets of SECOLI and of the Bursar General's Office.
- developments to be considered regarding the occupation of the Generalate.
- changes in positions of responsibility envisaged for 2009.

No doubt you already know that Brother Jose Antolinez Cuesta, former Visitor of the District of Valladolid, will be taking over from Brother Lorenzo Kipper as Secretary General of the Institute; and that Brother John Guasconi, of the LINE District, will replace the present incumbent as Director of the Generalate community.

Another topic which claimed the attention of the Councillors was the revision of the Rule requested by the General Chapter. A circular was drawn up and you will no doubt receive a copy soon, although the need for translation as well as printing constraints always tend to delay publication. The General Council also had informal meetings with the Brothers of the Generalate community by language groups, and with the lay staff. These meetings were both social occasions and an opportunity to share news from the Regions. A morning was devoted to a joint workshop with the General Council of the Sacred Heart Brothers, centred on two themes : association with lay persons, and initial and continuing formation of the Brothers.

## The North Belgium District Chapter

The first session, which I attended, took place at the end of September at Groot Bijgaarden.

Much time was spent on discussing the present situation, in particular the ageing of the Brothers, and the need to prepare for the future Lasallian presence in the educational world of Flemish Belgium. An outside facilitator made possible an exchange of views which was as free and as wide-ranging as possible, and which moved the thinking forward. Questions were raised in a frank and calm atmosphere :

- how to ensure every Brother enjoyed a dignified and peaceful old age;
- how to administer properties in the future;
- what kind of relations (human, material, spiritual) should be envisaged with an association composed of lay persons responsible for a trust (tutelle) overseeing the Lasallian network of institutions in North Belgium;
- how to organise the government of the District in a way that will ensure good administration of material goods, and human and spiritual leadership for the Brothers.

Various suggestions were made. It remains to formulate some answers and make some decisions. This will be the object of the second session which will be held in December.

## Commission meetings

These took place in September. The only exception was the Economy and Finance Commission which has only just had its meeting.

The work of the Commissions has enabled them to identify the main lines of action they need to concentrate on in the months and years ahead.

Before the January Conference, you will receive a report outlining these lines of action, and concrete proposals for their implementation. In the course of the Conference, you will have an opportunity to examine with the heads of the Commissions these lines of action and proposed forms of implementation, and to endorse them if you feel they are likely to be fruitful.

## Regional Council

It met as planned for a day at the beginning of October in Paris. All councillors attended. The

work of the Council dealt with four main areas :

- a written and oral report on Commission meetings followed by reactions from the councillors.
- preparation of the Jerusalem Conference. (You have already received the fruit of this preparation in the form of a letter giving you information and a suggested programme).
- a social gathering and discussion with the ASSEDIL Administration Council which was holding a meeting on the same day in Paris. It provided an opportunity, for example, for the MEL Commission to spend some time working with the participants of the next Congress which will be held in Ipswich on March 27th-30th 2009. During this meeting also we learned of the appointment of a general secretary for ASSEDIL - Mr Gérard Héloir, former principal of the school at St Denis, who retired recently. His role will be to make ASSEDIL more active in the service of the European school network.
- the examination of various questions, in particular, that of a Logo. Consultation regarding this project has begun with the Generalate communication department in Rome. You will have a chance to see suggested logos in Jerusalem.

### **Meeting for Lasallian bodies promoting solidarity**

This meeting was organised by PROYDE on the occasion of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The meeting was attended by the heads of NGOs or of other associations promoting international solidarity from the five continents. They met in Madrid to share their experiences, reflect on what working as a network means and presupposes, and see what position solidarity occupies among the Millennium aims promoted by the UN. The meeting was attended also by the heads of SECOLI and of the Secretariat for Development and Solidarity, Brother Jorge Gallardo, who oversees this secretariat, and Brother Francisco Lopez, Bursar General. The meeting was a good opportunity to make new contacts, gain a better understanding of particularly difficult situations, and to see more clearly the challenges and conditions of an Insitute involvement in this social context.

On the last afternoon, I called a meeting for all the heads of Lasallian solidarity-promoting bodies in RELEM. This enabled us to exchange views on four points :

- discovering what forms of collaboration already exist in RELEM;
- defining the needs to which NGOs have to respond, and regarding which, a separate response by each NGO is not sufficient;
- determining whether each NGO is prepared to work as part of a network with the others on the level of RELEM;
- if the answer is positive, setting out precisely the forms of collaboration which are thought to be desirable, pertinent and realistic.

The exchange of views was fruitful and enabled us to draw up a proposal which will be submitted to you. Before the Jerusalem Conference, you will receive a full report on this meeting.

### **Some reminders**

1. Thanks to the Districts which have responded to our request for information so that we can set up a RELEM data base. Would those who have still to send us information please do so soon. Your information will enable Brother Lorenzo to set up a data base and to send you a summary by January.

2. I remind you of Brother Charles Kitson's request to Districts to have a liaison officer for young Lasallians; that these Lasallians be clearly identified, as in certain Districts; or that this term be used to refer to young people who are involved in pastoral schemes organised within Districts. This liaison officer would be responsible for liaising between the Secretariat for the Lasallian Family, and particularly the international Council for Lasallian Youth, and young Lasallians in the strict or in a broader sense.

3. As you know, a formation session for leaders of young Lasallians has been organised for July.

Do not delay to contact young people who fit the suggested profile and who are likely to respond favourably to the invitation. Send Charles Kitson the address etc. of those who will be attending this formation session. This is a good opportunity to take stock of the young Lasallian movement, to help people make a start, and to prepare for the future. We never stop saying

this: the future is conditioned by the formation work of people that we agree to make available.

### **A visit to Malta**

I visited this island situated in the middle of the Mediterranean and lying between Europe and the Near East, on the invitation of the Maltese Brothers, and to take advantage of the presence there of Brother Aidan Kilty, Visitor of the District of Great Britain and Malta. Despite the shortness of my visit (3 days), and the great need of improvement where my knowledge of the English language is concerned, I was able to get some idea of the great value and fragility of the Lasallian presence there. The Brothers are few in number but continue to be a strong and recognised presence on the island. Recently, great effort has been invested in a formation programme to prepare for the future by enabling people to assimilate Lasallian tradition and to enrich it. It was in the course of my stay that I heard for the first time a married layman show how the educational thinking of John Baptist de La Salle inspired his life as a married person and as a parent. Worth noting also is the existence of a large committed group (about sixty persons) of Signum Fidei members composed of teachers, parents and former students.

### **A meeting with the Scolpio Fathers**

The Scolpio Fathers invited me to a conference of the provincials of Europe to speak to them about the way the Brothers of the Christian Schools take into account the European dimension. They had invited also a Salesian General Councillor responsible for west Europe. Our thinking and the structures we had put in place aroused their interest even though their situation was different because of their numbers and the number of their houses in Europe. This meeting enabled me also to learn of the Salesians' plan for Europe, which is a source of concern for the whole Institute. This concern is reflected in their sending Salesians from other continents to "revitalise" provinces in need of new blood. Should we take our inspiration from them ?

### **A word of thanks**

I thank all the Districts for their participation in the running of RELEM. All have paid their subscription. Money is a quantifiable reality , important in order to keep things running well, as the current economic crisis shows. It is also a sign of active solidarity, and reflects a commitment to contribute to its continued existence and growth.