

GENERAL COUNCILLORS RESPOND TO CILISTS' QUESTIONS ON GENERAL CHAPTER

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This article is a summary of the responses of the three resident General Councillors, Brothers Alberto Gomez, Claude Reinhardt and Jorge Gallardo, to questions put to them by members of the CIL programme on December 21st 2007.

The 44th General Chapter, following recommendations of its predecessor, adopted an 'alternative model', enabling fuller dialogue and deeper reflection. The Preparatory Commission helped the capitulants develop a consensus-building approach rather than the more divisive voting system previously employed. Consensus-building is about discovering shared beliefs and points of view and is more open to the grace of community. A more prayerful atmosphere allowed the Holy Spirit easier access to the minds and hearts of the capitulants. In this spirit of discernment the priorities for the future of our Institute require deep personal and community prayer. A more authentic expression of our consecration as Brothers in communities, available for appropriate mission, should result. This is why the Vow of Association gained such prominence at this Chapter.

Our Founder and the early Brothers put this vow to the fore in their consecration formulae of 1691 and 1694. The Bull of Approbation granted by Pope Benedict XIII in 1725 required us to include the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. The Vow of Association must not be understood in isolation among the five we pronounce. The present context of our Vow of Association includes the models of Church and of Religious Life that proceeded from Vatican II, as well as our reflections on the present and future situations in which we may find ourselves.

Our consecration as Religious Brothers with our Vow of Association emphasises the fundamental importance of Community Life. The 44th General Chapter also brings to the fore the complementary importance of our interior life. In order to respond to the needs that our religious consecration beckons, our community life and our interior life must be deeply authentic, generous and faithful.

The Capitulants responded positively to the report of the International Assembly of 2006. Each District may respond to the desire of many of our colleagues in the Lasallian mission to share the charism of our Founder, understand better his spirituality and help to raise their professional status to the dignity of a vocation. This is an ongoing process, requiring prayerful discernment by each District to allow the most appropriate expression of this development to come to fruition. It would be wrong to confine this movement to structures, rules and laws

before it is allowed to flower naturally under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Each of us has to listen to our Lasallian colleagues, who may not be consecrated religious, but clearly share our apostolic mission within our Lasallian tradition. Together we must consider how best to grow in the Spirit so that we may effectively respond to relevant needs.

The theology of this kind of 'association' is founded on the model of church that develops from the documents of Vatican II, particularly that of *The Church in the Modern World*. We are familiar with the MEL documents and recent Lasallian Studies available on the Institute web site considering the theological, pastoral and social implications for us as Brothers in association with those who share our mission in the Church. The nature of this 'association' is still open to question, and still requires considerable research. Its meaning is at the same time specific for many who identify themselves as 'associates', but remains vague in its many applications and expressions world wide.

The Vow of Association is linked to our providing gratuitous education for the poor. We all need to be continuously converted to this ideal. Poverty in itself is not a value. Our Vow of Poverty must not be understood in purely material terms. To be poor is not, in itself, a religious style of life. Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, and consorting with sinners. We are certainly called to a simplicity of life. In our modern world we are tempted from all sides by consumerism and individualism. This seems to be especially the case with technological gadgetry, sometimes even to addiction for some Brothers. In our community meetings we should honestly question the extent to which our possessions or our life style actually serve our mission. We should be more and have less. At our community meetings each of us should ask: 'Can I live without this?' We should challenge each other about such things as travel, drink, the use of cars, and compare such use with the common people around us. We must ask ourselves whether we are good Christian employers, establishing a loving working relationship and providing just wages and proper working conditions.

The 44th General Chapter did not set out to answer questions, but rather to challenge each Brother, each community and each District to reflect prayerfully, in the context of local needs and make a careful appraisal of how best to respond. Prayerful discernment is essential if we are to answer God's call to us to respond in a spirit of faith and zeal today and for the future.