

Brother Visitor's Letter

Dear Lasallians,

I write this on the eve of our District Chapter which will take place in Kintbury from May 26 to May 30th. I am conscious that, while for the Brothers, Chapters are part and parcel of their Lasallian religious life, for many of our Lasallian colleagues they remain something of a mystery, perhaps suggesting to them difference and exclusion rather than complementarity. In effect, Chapters, whether District Chapter or General Chapters, are regulated by Church law with regard to content and participation and date from a time when lay participation was very much the exception. As we all know, Church law, for many reasons, even with the impetus of Vatican II, tends to be rather slow in adapting to changing circumstances!

Initially, Chapters were intended to address all aspects of the Brother's life but as the participation of our lay colleagues in the Lasallian mission developed to the point where today they constitute more than 95% of those involved in that mission, it has become abundantly clear that some new structures are needed to reflect this radically different reality. Lasallian mission is no longer in the hands of the Brothers alone. It was for this reason that a number of lay colleagues were invited to participate in the General Chapter of 2000, an initiative that was followed in some of our own more recent District Chapters. A subsequent development of this consultative process was the International Assembly in Rome, "Associated for the Lasallian Educational Mission" (2006), which was the forum through which Lasallians directly involved in mission were invited to contribute to the elaboration of Institute policy subsequently developed by the 44th General Chapter in May 2007. In our own District, in a more simplified way, we attempted to replicate this process by promoting the recent Lasallian Assembly as a forum for our lay colleagues to contribute to our District Chapter.

Nobody involved in these initiatives, locally or internationally, would claim that they have been entirely satisfactory and the search for more appropriate structures must continue. In our case that will involve the close collaboration of all involved in the Lasallian mission while recognising that progress, much as it desired by all, has to negotiate significant external constraints, not only of Canon law but also of Charity law, to say nothing of those imposed by local educational authorities and social services.

So, as we gather for our District Chapter in the light of this changing reality, my hope is that we will continue this search for effective structures for mission. At the same time I also hope that we, as Brothers, can evaluate the structures of our own lives, what the 44th General Chapter terms our "interior" and "community life", so as to enable us to be credible witnesses to an authentic spirituality that will support and inspire those who bear the brunt of the Lasallian mission today.

Finally, as Bro. Alvaro pointed out recently in an address in Rome and reiterated in an intervention during our own Assembly, any search for new structures has to be in function of mission. In his words: "...*By responding to the needs of children and young people, being attentive to their fragile lives, being sensitive to their poverty, discovering in them the very face of Jesus, as the Founder recommends to us, all of this is the principal reason that should lead us to restructuring... which, with creativity and energy, will help us to find paths of life and hope in their favour...*"



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