

FORMATION FOR THE LASALLIAN MISSION

Brothers and Lay Persons together will intensify the activities of Centers of Formation, suitable courses and programs. (C 435, p. 47)

PRELUDE

3.40 *It is clear that the continuing vitality of the Lasallian Mission will depend on the extent to which all those engaged in it have the necessary preparation and formation to keep themselves and the Lasallian mission up to date. In this process, the Brothers, whose numerical involvement is shrinking, have their particular role to play as “heart” and “memory” of the Lasallian Heritage. There is an urgent need to ensure that other Lasallian educators have different forms of access to this Lasallian Heritage according to their personal backgrounds and their desire to be more deeply involved. This reciprocity of relationship, this interdependence between Brothers and Lay Partners or colleagues, has particular implications which need to be explored in greater depth by considering the necessary processes by which others may be inducted into the Heritage and how their understanding and appreciation may be further developed and sustained.*

3.41 Formation for the Lasallian mission

Proposition 4 from the 42nd General Chapter in 1993 insisted that “*in the Institute, at every level, shared mission is to be one of the priorities for the next seven years*” and that “*the District will make the Lasallian formation of teachers and educators a fundamental priority.*” (C 435, 5.4, p. 47) As part of the Institute’s implementation of this request, the *Institute Bulletin No. 242, 1996*, is devoted completely to setting out *Experiences of Shared Mission* from all around the Lasallian world. In some way or another, all the activities so described can be understood as part of the continuing formation for this priority, but certain chapters are explicitly so. For example, Chapter 4 entitled *Sharing the Mission requires an adequate formation* (pp. 32-57), gives 26 examples of various courses, workshops and seminars which address this question of formation. Some of these courses are run in permanent Lasallian Centers, others in *ad hoc* Lasallian Centers and most of them are individual units of a complete course over a scheduled number of meetings which may run during a year, two years, or over three summers.

3.42 Those for whom Lasallian formation is intended

It is obvious that some basic or initial Lasallian formation is important for all those who are to work in various ways in the Lasallian Mission. This includes the Brothers with their particular formation as members of the Institute and all others who wish to work in the same spirit. Then there is the question of continuing formation, the necessary updating which is part of professional life, but also the attention to the underlying spirituality which can help transform school teaching into ministry. Such continuing formation is indispensable for all who share the mission. Indeed, one of the most important gifts which the Brothers have to share out of their own lived experience as members of the Institute is the willingness to participate in such continuing forma-

tion sessions so as to facilitate the passing on of their lived experience as “*heart*” and “*memory*.” No less important for them is the opportunity for them to hear the questions posed by their lay partners in their search for a lay spirituality which is derived from the Lasallian Heritage but which is not simply a scaled-down version of the Brother’s spirituality.

The role, indeed the *duty*, of the Brothers’ community is clearly indicated by the *Rule* in the two stages which follow. First of all, “*The Brothers’ community makes known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition.*” Then, with great respect for individuals, a second stage is proposed as “*The Brothers offer to those who desire it, a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific commitment. The Brothers join in the formation of faith communities which are witnessing to the truth of what the Brothers profess.*” (R 17c) The activities in the already mentioned *Institute Bulletin No. 242* offers some ten very different examples of how some communities and Districts have implemented this second stage (pp. 98-107). Indeed, it is not really possible to separate spirituality as such into a kind of separate compartment in the Lasallian Heritage since it furnishes the underlying principles for the educational work. In that sense, practically all the experiences cited in the Bulletin indicate various stages of that “*more intensified sharing*” of which the *Rule* speaks.

3.43 The aim of Lasallian formation

The aim of Lasallian formation is to ensure that educators make a gospel ministry out of their work and thus successfully carry out the mission which is being entrusted more and more to them. It is certainly true that there is a content to be handed on, certain non-negotiable aspects which are essential if new teachers are to come to understand progressively that their task can be a gospel ministry and carried out as such. Of course, since not all Lasallian educators are Christians, the formation of such persons needs to take into account important religious and cultural differences. In this matter, *Bulletin No. 242* has an extremely interesting account of how the Lasallian Center in Egypt has developed its program to include its non-Christian teachers (cf .p 46). Basically, this approach gives emphasis to two specific dimensions of the Lasallian tradition, the importance of a human formation (formation to human values) and the educational service of the poor.

Formation is obviously a continuing process which demands personal conversion, the renewal of educational communities and the bringing up to date of whatever is needed to achieve this aim. The final aim in centers of Christian confession is to create, where possible, the “*communities of faith*” of which the *Rule* speaks. (R 17c)

3.44 The spirit of Lasallian formation

Becoming *partners in mission* is the ideal which the 1993 General Chapter proposed to all who share the Lasallian Mission. This means that they participate together “in complementarity and without paternalism” (C 435, p. 32) in the same programs. Such a common formation of Brothers and Lay Persons is in the spirit of Recommendation 5.4 from the same source:

“Brothers and Lay Persons together:

- a) will intensify the activities of Centers of formation, suitable course and programs;*
- b) develop Lasallian research, information and communication;*
- c) name one (or more) persons to coordinate, animate and supervise this formation.”* (C 435 p. 47)

3.45 Conditions for a Lasallian formation

Experience teaches that there are several conditions which guarantee the value of Lasallian formation for teachers and educators.

- It needs to be adapted to the diversity of the recipients, to their needs, their expectations, their state of life, their family or professional commitments. Certain programs need to be considered in relation to the responsibilities which they carry out or could be asked to carry out in shared mission. As the General Chapter (C. 435, p. 32) comments, *“it is important that the strategies and the programs allow for a wide participation,”* and develop with a certain flexibility.
- Since it is a continuing formation, it needs a follow-up. It should not, therefore, limit the structures of accompaniment in order to give more life to the content by simply multiplying sessions which are mainly informational. It should help whoever wishes *“to develop further his or her commitment, according to the successive calls which might be received.”* (Ibid)
- It should take care to be progressive and set up according to stages. On this matter, the General Chapter has also given some directions:
“Some of these programs offer information and ‘pre formation,’ for example, about works, objectives and methods of the Institute for those who have a professional relationship with the Institute; others will be more specific, offering stimulating information and an appropriate formation for people who are committed. For those who wish to share in the mission to the extent of forming Lasallian communities of faith, a deeper formation is needed: ‘They provide for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit.’” (R 17) (ibid, p. 33).
- It needs time. It is continuing formation with all its aspects for *“in order to take on the challenges of the world of education, we need to develop and deepen our mutual understanding, to respect our differences and to trust in one another.”* (Ibid, p. 14)

3.46 The content of Lasallian formation

Experience shows that the following dimensions be given importance in Lasallian formation:

- an anthropological dimension which favors the human and spiritual maturity of the Lasallian educator;
- a professional dimension which envisages the acquisition of “know-how,” but especially a “knowing-how-to-be” in the relationship between adults and young persons;
- a Christian dimension in view of the ministry of Christian education;

- a Lasallian dimension which begins from John Baptist de La Salle's own story and from the Lasallian educational heritage.

Each District and Region needs to work on this content in relation to its particular Lasallian origins and cultural circumstances.

3.47 Joint responsibility for Lasallian formation

The responsibility for Lasallian formation should gradually be assumed jointly by Brothers and their Lay partners and colleagues. The Recommendations of the 42nd General Chapter (5.2 to 5.14, pp. 4649) go into great detail. At the local level, every educational work is to see to this as one of its priorities; at the community level, the *“means of living the shared mission”* are to be indicated, with particular attention to the community’s willingness to be welcoming and open to sharing the means of *“human, educational and spiritual formation”*; at the individual level, each Brother is invited to reflect on his *“specific way”* of committing himself to the shared mission. At the District level, it is the Brother Visitor and Council who are responsible for setting out the plan for Shared Mission which the 1993 General Chapter in Proposition 5 requested to be in place by 1995. This plan was to be worked out and evaluated *“with the participation of partners associated with the educational mission.”* The *Institute Bulletin No. 242* gives an extremely rich panorama of what is being already done around the Lasallian world.

3.48 The creation of appropriate structures

Educational programs, no matter how good in themselves, will not achieve the long-term aims of Shared Mission unless certain structures are put into place. Such structures are not imposed. Indeed, it is the spirit of association which becomes embodied in appropriate structures and thus favors the communion of persons and groups in the Lasallian Family, while at the same time respecting the autonomy of each. This seems to be an area where there remains much to be done even if certain groups, such as Signum Fidei in some countries, parent groups and youth groups, associations of former pupils, already have their own established structures. The most pressing need, certainly, is that structures of equality be established between Brothers and Partners in Shared Mission. Good will by itself is not enough. This kind of association of different groups with diverse interests needs “rules” which ensure the harmonious exercise of the responsibilities of each group in carrying out a task, a plan, a mission.

The 42nd General Chapter insisted on this aspect of collaboration between Brothers and lay people by the following details:

“The relationships among the partners in the shared mission ought to be characterized by respect, understanding, justice and mutual trust. Collaboration implies that both rights and duties are recognized by everyone in what concerns regulations, work contracts and job descriptions. Collaboration ought to guarantee an effective co-responsibility, common understanding of guidelines and of priorities and shared power in preparing, making and carrying out decisions.” (C 435, 3.63, p. 44)

At the District level, the recommendations are an invitation to put appropriate structures into place so as to assure a harmonious and fruitful collaboration between Brothers and lay people as the two following citations indicate:

“The District will strengthen the structures (people, places) with a view to animating and coordinating the shared mission, after having been the object of discernment between the Brothers and Laity. These structures will respect the various levels of commitment in the mission of the Lasallian network.” (c 435, 5.6, p. 47)

“In the light of Article 17 of the Rule, the District will strive more and more to integrate the Lasallian Family and the Shared Mission. It will take into account the requisite changes which sharing necessitates:

- recognition of the rights and duties of everybody (position, work contract, family expenses);*
- mutual recognition and confidence;*
- sharing of responsibilities.”*

3.49 The challenge to be confronted

The future of the Lasallian mission of human and Christian education clearly depends now on the way in which the shared mission is developed. The capitulants and consultants at the 42nd General Chapter in 1993 saw this with great clarity and the Brothers have since received the practical recommendations contained in Circular 435. Many different sectors of the Institute have already developed and implemented long-term planning for the development of shared mission. On the principle of sharing “family documents” as enunciated in the Introduction to this document (pp. 9-10), it seems important to share finally some of the main recommendations of Circular 435, pp. 47-48 so that these points may serve as a common reference point for continuing evaluation by all concerned with shared mission.

At District Level

5.4 The District will make the Lasallian formation of teachers and educators a fundamental priority. To achieve this aim, Brothers and Laity together:

- a) will intensify the activities of Centers of formation, suitable courses and programs;
- b) develop Lasallian research, information and communication;
- c) name one (or more) persons to coordinate, animate and supervise this formation.

5.5 The District will take the necessary means to ensure that every Lasallian work, when that is possible, favors the birth of a community of faith, a reference group capable of welcoming various persons (Brothers, priests, religious, laity, young people) who wish to deepen their faith and whose concern it is to proclaim in an explicit way Jesus Christ and to commit themselves to the service of the poor.

5.6 The District will strengthen the structures (people, places) with a view to animating and coordinating the shared mission, after having been the object of discernment between the Brothers and Laity. These structures will respect the various levels of commitment in the mission of the Lasallian network.

5.7 In the light of Article 17 of the *Rule*, the District will strive more and more to integrate the Lasallian Family and the shared mission. It will take into account the requisite changes which sharing necessitates:

- recognition of the rights and duties of everybody (position, work contract, family expenses . . .);
- mutual recognition and confidence;
- sharing of responsibilities.

5.8 The "Signum Fidei" groups constitute for the Districts a form of spirituality well suited to the laity, especially educators, which finds its source of inspiration in St. John Baptist de La Salle.

5.9 The District will contribute to the renewal of Alumni Associations according to the spirit of the "Charter of the World Federation of Former Lasallian Students."

5.10 The District is concerned about the formation of animators (assessors), either Brothers or lay people, for the various Lasallian groups, in order to favor their own identity and autonomy but avoiding every form of paternalism and clericalism.

5.11 The Brother Visitor will make the shared mission one of the most important themes of his visits. Together with his council, he will plan to invite the laity to retreats, chapters and other meetings of the Brothers.

As an overall strategy to respond to the overall picture presented by the various diagrams of 1.52, the priorities could be summarized as follows:

Groups of persons committed to the shared mission should be given programs of gradual initiation and continuing formation in which the members feel that they are being accompanied, that they have the support of other members of their group and that they accept responsibility for the continuing inspiration of the Lasallian communities of the future.